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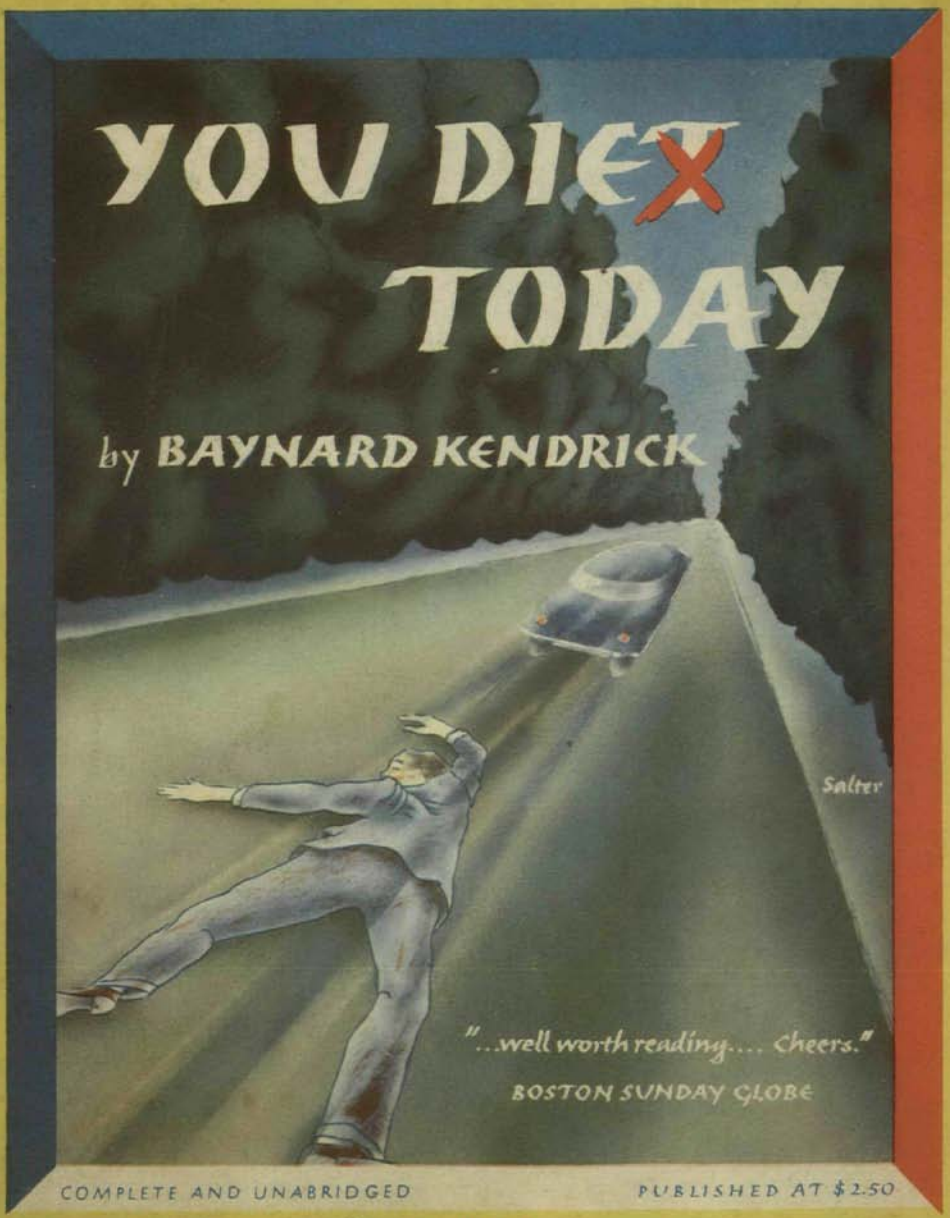

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YOU DIE TODAY

BY

BAYNARD KENDRICK

Author of:

Blind Man's Bluff
Lights Out
Make Mine Maclain

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

MERCURY MYSTERY

MERCURY PUBLICATIONS • NEW YORK
JOSEPH W. FERMAN, *Publisher*

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A MERCURY MYSTERY, NO. 205

35¢ a copy — $4.00 a year

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MERCURY PUBLICATIONS, INC., 471 Park Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

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CHAPTER ONE

"ANYTHING MORE for you, sir?"

Ted Yates made a guess that the bartender was talking to him because the voice came from a point directly in front of him.

"Another Tom Collins and put some gin in it this time, will you? I can get ice water at my hotel."

"A double?"

"Treble. I don't give a damn so long as you put some gin in it."

"I'll make it a double."

"Thanks." Ted took out his wallet and located a ten-dollar bill, folded lengthwise. Fives he folded end to end. Ones he left flat.

He was powerful and thick-set, five-foot-eleven with a roundish face, light crew-cut hair, and a high intelligent forehead. He had graduated from West Point with honors and made something of a name for himself in football. Like many men with a tendency toward overweight he was quick and catlike on his feet, and a rhythmical well-poised dancer.

The bartender came back with his drink, picked up the bill, and put down change — a bill, two quarters and a dime.

"Four-forty," the bartender said. "Okay?"

Ted hadn't realized he'd drunk that much. The heat was getting him down. It was one of those evenings when the gin had no more kick than water. He'd eaten dinner at Billy The Oysterman's on Twentieth Street, then started cruising around from bar to bar; but the drinks, instead of buoying up his spirits, only seemed to make him hotter. Now he was in some joint on Third Avenue, maybe not drunk, but at a stage where he'd grown suspicious.

He pushed the bill back to the bartender and said, "Give me five ones."

The man said, "What do you think I'm trying to do, put one over by giving you a one instead of a five?"

A silence fell at the bar.

Ted gave him what he thought was a belligerent stare, but his round,

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blue, perfectly matched eyes only made him look benign. "I'm blind," he said.

"Who could miss?" the bartender asked. "I'm not cheating blind men."

"Nobody says you are," Ted said, "and you don't need to pity them, either. I prefer carrying ones, to tens or fives. Then I know what they are. Okay?"

"Sure," the bartender said. "Okay." He changed the five.

Ted picked up the ones, put them in his pocket and left a quarter for a tip. He felt that it probably wasn't enough, but he resented tipping bartenders anyway.

He unfolded his light aluminum collapsible cane and made his way rather skillfully out into the oppressiveness of Third Avenue.

An El train roared by overhead.

Ted fingered the bills in his pocket and struck off confidently downtown. He'd have a nightcap before he went to bed, but right now he'd have to watch his money. There was another five in his wallet, but that was all.

His pension check came in on the first and that was three days away.

He'd found himself nervous and afraid since the land mine blew up in his face in Korea. Now he got to thinking of fear again, analyzing it and picking it apart. It was fear of darkness, fear of being dependent on people, fear of being a maimed-looking freak, fear that some girl would learn to love him out of pity, fear of growing unduly suspicious and bitter. Or, as F.D.R. had put it once, it was fear of fear.

His moving cane, swinging swiftly from side to side ahead of him as he walked, signaled an impeding structure. He felt steps leading up and recognized the elevated station at Fourteenth Street. The crosstown traffic was moving. He stood on the curb and waited until he heard it stop and resume its course on Third Avenue.

His feet were scarcely off the curb when a car swung right from Third Avenue, missing him by a narrow margin. He stood still, trembling, until a man came up, took his arm and led him across.

On the other side Ted thanked him, turned west and headed for Broadway. Somewhere from a nearby tower a clock bonged out eleven.

He crossed Fourth Avenue and Broadway without any trouble and turned downtown on the west side of Broadway.

Six months of being a blinded veteran had taught him one thing. Once he learned to know a neighborhood, except for the crowds and the traffic, it was just the same at night as during the day. Ted shut his eyes again and tried to picture it now as Tubby Severn had described it. It was strange how he could picture things better with his eyes shut tight. Maybe it was the natural action for clearer thinking.

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There were times when Ted thought that Myron Severn, known to the few who really knew him as Tubby, had been nearly every place in the world and knew nearly everything that there was to know. Sifted down to its minutest details, most of Ted's opinion about Tubby was unquestionably true.

Tubby had known Ted's father in Chicago when Ted was a growing boy. Ted's father, Harold Yates, was a brewer. Tubby had set him up in business when brewing was a hazardous occupation carried out in a fortress, and beer was distributed at the point of a gun, or several guns.

Now Tubby had a nighterie, the Merry-Go-Round, on West Fifty-first Street. Tubby also had a number of other things, not quite so well known. Under his joviality, Tubby was a cautious man who had been trained in a hard city and a harder school. He had learned two great truths from his youth in Chicago — nobody could tell what they didn't know, and dead men knew nothing.

But it was Tubby who had given Ted the greatest encouragement when Ted came back from Korea. Ted wanted to write, and once freed from the hospital and plastic work on his face he had tried it at home in Chicago. It had taken him just about a month to find out that with his father's help and his mother's solicitous coddling driving him crazy, writing at home was something he could never do. It was Tubby who persuaded him to come to New York, and got him a room at the Broadway Palace Hotel.

It was Tubby who had put him on a daily stint of five hundred words, good, bad, or indifferent, and who kept plugging at him to use his brains since he didn't have eyes, and to form his own pictures from surroundings that were new before he tried to write them down.

The only thing he hadn't told Tubby about was the presence of the fear. It had started almost two months before, when he first came on to New York City. It had started because Ted had a feeling that something about Tubby Severn was wrong. He had known Tubby off and on since he, Ted, was a kid in grammar school, but Tubby had changed since Ted returned blinded from Korea. Tubby's laughter was infrequent and strained, and Tubby was drinking heavily, something Ted had never known him to do before.

Ted kept in mind that darkness breeds fear. You could reach a stage when imagination began to get you. Of course, that might happen even if you could see. Still the taciturn, moody New York night club owner seemed a long cry from the rather easygoing Tubby that Ted remembered from boyhood days in Chicago.

Ted quickened his steps.

He had intended to stop in the Brittany Bar at Tenth Street, but some

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traitorous dread kept moving his legs and carried him on.

He was almost running when he reached the Broadway Palace Hotel. He missed the door and bruised his arm. Then he found the door and was suddenly safe in his place at the bar.

He took a stool and the air-conditioning struck him with a chill. Before Ted could give an order, from his usual table in the corner by the curtained window to Broadway Tubby Severn's voice burst forth rendering *La Marseillaise* in French and a slightly drunken baritone.

Just as suddenly Ted found he wasn't safe at all. *La Marseillaise* reminded him of Maj. Gen. Pierre Scanlon. The soldiers in World War II called him Frenchy and hated his guts. To Frenchy Scanlon *La Marseillaise*, sung by his troops in mockery, was a hated song.

Ted's mind galloped back to the night in March, 1950, when he, as General Scanlon's aide, boarded the fatal *Orange Limited* en route to training in Florida under hush-hush orders that they might soon be shipped to Korea. Twenty minutes out of Penn Station, the *Limited* had run into an open switch in a blinding snowstorm and piled up in the New Jersey marshes. Frenchy had met a woman and was talking to her in the compartment he shared with Ted. Ted was drinking in the club car.

Terror crept back over him again as he thought of the crash, the piled-up wreck and the screaming people, the flames spurting up to the sky.

When they pulled him out, General Scanlon was dead — but not from the wreck. He'd been shot through the head with a service Colt held close to his temple. The wreckage was searched for days, but Ted's service gun that he'd left in the compartment with Scanlon had never been recovered. . . .

The bartender came up and said, "Good evening, Mr. Yates. What can I do for you?"

"You might shut up Tubby for me," Ted said. "I don't like that song. Where did he get it?"

"He had a friend with him who started it, I believe. He left a few minutes ago. Are you going to join Mr. Severn or have a drink here? He's alone at the table now."

Tubby started singing again, a little bit louder and much more off key.

"Neither," Ted said. "I think I'll hit the sack. That French tenor of Tubby's is getting too much for me. Good night." He slid down from his stool and went back out into the heat and utter silence of Broadway.

The door to the bar swung shut behind him, closing in the noisy chatter and the remnant of song that had stirred up so vividly a Pandora's box of memories.

Ted turned left toward the main entrance to the hotel just a short

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distance away. The guiding tip of his cane had scarcely touched the wall underneath the grillroom's wide casement window when the blast of a heavy-caliber pistol split the silence of the street not three feet in front of him.

Every nerve in his body, overtaut from battle shock and blindness, seemed to snap at the unexpected ear-splitting sound. Moved by a lightning-fast, completely involuntary reaction, Ted dropped his cane and launched himself directly at the sound of the gun.

He crashed into a muscular body as heavy as his own, and heard the clank of metal as the pistol fell to the sidewalk, knocked from the shooter's hand by the force of Ted's surprise attack.

Ted tried to grapple, but the other man was quicker and could see. A leg went out in a skillful trip, and caught off balance Ted went down to land almost on top of the fallen gun.

Driven by panic, he picked it up and emptied it in seven quick shots toward the sound of the heavy footfalls receding down Broadway in a steady run.

CHAPTER TWO

AFTER THIRTY-FIVE YEARS of his life spent in total darkness, Capt. Duncan Maclain had developed a personal philosophy of living from day to day. Yesterday was gone so why worry about what had already passed?

Clutter up your mind with what had passed and what was to come and you filled it with problems beyond your control. The human mind at its best was a storage place of limited capacity. Overload it with uncontrollable problems that were past and problems that were to come and no space was left for concentration on the immediate problem at hand: how to live to the fullest the short swift span of the next twenty-four hours.

The Captain probably enjoyed the hour directly after breakfast more than any other time of the day. This morning he was sitting in back of his broad flat-topped mahogany desk fingering the intricate design on the lid of a cloisonné snuffbox that served as a cigarette container.

The heat outside was blistering, but the Captain's air-conditioned office was delightfully cool.

Stretched out on a red leather divan, Spud Savage, the Captain's partner and closest friend since World War I, was rustling through the morning papers picking out the stories in the news that long experience had taught

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him would prove of the most interest to Captain Duncan Maclain.

The aftermath of the Kefauver investigation was still very much to the fore. " 'Assistant Police Commissioner Alleges U.S. Gambling Exceeds a Billion a Year,' " Spud read. " 'Matt Snowden, Alleged Operator of New York and New Jersey Wire Rooms, To Be Questioned.' "

The Captain set the cigarette box down on the desk with a tiny *bang*.

Spud looked at him over the top of the newspaper and grinned. "Irritated?"

"I thought I might write to somebody suggesting that we change the name of the country to the United States of Allegations," said Duncan Maclain. " 'To allege' means 'to assert without proof.' How the devil do these lousy crooks get away with it, Spud?"

"Any in particular that you have in mind?"

"I guess I'm just speaking generally," said Maclain. "I made the statement at the outbreak of World War II that the people of the United States didn't believe in spies. It's reached such a point today with the tension we're under that I'm beginning to think that the country doesn't believe in anything. Take this Matt Snowden — he'd been popping in and out of the news for two years. The police know where he lives and how he makes his money."

"Allegedly," Spud said.

" 'Allegedly,' hell," said Maclain. "He buys his way out of everything, paying from the top down like a hundred others. So we have to take time out in Congress before anybody gets the right to question him. Why? Because the public doesn't give a damn. Because every father and mother says, 'Why, that nice Mr. Zilch who lives in the big house down the street couldn't possibly be making all his money by buying basketball teams or selling heroin to the kids in my son's own high school. Besides that, my little Willie's a good boy. He's not like any of the others. He wouldn't use any heroin if it was offered to him free and he doesn't play basketball anyhow.' "

"You sound bitter," Spud said.

"I'm not bitter," the Captain told him. "I'm sick to my stomach. I'm fed up to the teeth with the blindness of the public and the maudlin sympathy that's been built up about the sanctity of high officials. Proof —" The Captain made a noise with his lips. "You got me started in this private investigation business twenty-five years ago. I'm blind as a bat, but I never saw a crook or a killer that an honest investigator or an honest policeman couldn't put away."

Spud said, "Things have grown more complicated today."

"Bigger, not more complicated," said Maclain.

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"Well, maybe that's what I mean," Spud said. "The boys have taken a leaf from the book of the big corporations. They're hiring C.P.A.'s and lawyers and killers."

"Sometimes I wonder," said Maclain.

"About what?"

"About their hiring killers. It strikes me, Spud, the days of Murder Inc. are past. It's risky to hire a killer. He's got you over a barrel for the rest of your life."

"So what's the alternative?"

"There are two or three," the Captain said slowly. "I was talking to Sergeant Archer of Homicide about it not so long ago. His idea is that it's cheaper and safer for the real big operator to do his own killing if it ever becomes necessary, and to hire some lug to furnish him with a perfect alibi. Inspector Davis agreed with him and added something more."

"About killings?"

"About alibis. It's Davis' contention that the really smart operators today who get themselves involved in one or more rackets spend a lot of time and a lot of money setting up a dual identity, in the way the old-time bigamists used to work — different residences and different names, sometimes in the same city and sometimes in different cities."

"It sounds confusing," Spud said.

"It's intended to be," the Captain told him. "Davis knew of one racketeer who had as many as three. If one of his schemes went sour the particular name he was using would vanish out of existence. And if he was picked up under his real name he could always look hurt and injured, trot out his well-paid alibis, and say, 'Look, Mr. Policeman, you've got the wrong fellow. I never even heard of that dirty deal. That wasn't me.' "

As the Captain talked, Spud was riffling over the paper idly. He said, "Here's a hot one . . ."

The telephone rang sharply and the Captain answered, "Severn? Myron Severn? . . . You got my name from Inspector Davis? . . . Yes, Mr. Severn. . . . Oh. . . . Well, I'm leaving here in about an hour. I'm staying with my partner and his wife out on Long Island and we just happened to be here overnight. My wife's waiting for me out there. . . . Yes, I see. . . . Well, if you can make it before eleven. It's ten o'clock now. . . . Okay, I'll wait." The Captain hung up. "Is there anything in the paper about a blinded veteran named Yates? You didn't read it to me."

"I just saw it when the phone rang," Spud said. " 'Blind Veteran Shoots Up Broadway.' New York. Yesterday's dateline. 'Shortly before midnight in front of the Broadway Palace Hotel, between Third and Fourth Street,

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Lieutenant Theodore Yates, recently blinded in Korea, fired eight shots from a service Colt forty-five automatic. Due to the heat and the late hour, lower Broadway was deserted and no one was hurt. Although police claim that the first shot from the automatic was fired through an open pane in a casement window of the hotel bar and grill, narrowly missing Myron Severn who was seated at a table in the bar, Yates when placed under arrest vehemently denied this fact.

" 'Lieutenant Yates, who in spite of his blindness put up a terrific fight when officers attempted to seize him, states that he stepped from the bar just as someone fired a shot close by, and, without quite knowing what he was doing, that he dove for the sound of the gun and knocked it to the sidewalk from the unseen assailant's hand. According to Yates, the assailant started to run, after pushing Yates to the sidewalk. Yates says that, frightened and confused, he picked up the gun and fired it at the sound of the running footsteps, which disappeared around Third Street headed west.

" 'Myron Severn, who narrowly escaped being killed, is well known in sporting circles around New York as the owner and proprietor of the Merry-Go-Round night club on West Fifty-first Street. Mr. Severn states that Theodore Yates is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Harold Yates of Chicago and that he has known the lieutenant for many years. He is inclined to believe that Yate's story is true although police are unable to verify it.

" 'Mr. Severn was in the bar with James Hyland, the manager of Huck Hardesty's Health Farm, Philipstown, New York, until a few minutes before the shooting occurred when Mr. Hyland left to return to Philipstown. Myron Severn was questioned by a grand jury two years ago in connection with a black market scandal involving food supplies for Korea but was cleared of all complicity. Mr. Severn and Lieutenant Yates are both residents of the Broadway Palace Hotel. Lieutenant Yates was taken to Bellevue for observation. The police are investigating.' "

"Severn's coming up here about eleven." The Captain made a design on the blotter in front of him with the tip of his sensitive forefinger.

"So I judged," Spud said dryly, "and for your information I'm leaving now. We were to meet Rena and Sybella at Forest Hills at twelve o'clock. Rena has my car. I'll take the subway out to Forest Hills and we'll drive Sybella out to the farm with us. I'll leave Cappo and the Cadillac here for you."

"Thanks." The Captain's clear sightless eyes seemed to be staring at the ceiling. "You remember Huck Hardesty, Spud?"

"Quite well. After all, I was up at his place three times with you. I also remember that he hanged himself a couple of years ago. Same day old Judge Rafferty died up there, wasn't it?"

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"Same day." The Captain traced an invisible question mark in the air. "Hanging for Huck, heart failure for Rafferty — *A*-plus for the local coroner."

"What are you driving at now?" Spud asked.

"I don't quite know," said Duncan Maclain.

"But you intend to find out! Huh!" Spud gave a derisive grunt. "Even if it ruins the rest of our summer vacation, you intend to find out what the manager of Huck Hardesty's Health Farm was doing in the bar with Myron Severn shortly before Mr. Severn was shot at. Well, you can find out on your own." Spud stood up. "I'm taking your wife and mine and myself out to where the beans are green and the waves are double-crested. You'd better come along, Dunc, and forget it."

"I have a date to get a blinded veteran out of Bellevue," said Duncan Maclain.

CHAPTER THREE

Tubby Severn had the jitters.

He liked to think that as a man who had really been around he had an open mind. He prided himself on lacking the public's fear of the blind. Since Ted Yates had come on to New York from Chicago, he had actually learned to resent the public's fear.

Now, in Capt. Duncan Maclain's air-cooled oasis of an office, twenty-six stories above Seventy-second Street and Riverside Drive, Tubby was beginning to resent his own attitude toward Duncan Maclain.

He had heard the Captain speak a couple of times — once at a Legion convention and again before the Lions' Club. He knew Maclain's unquestioned standing with press and police. Larry Davis, the police inspector that Tubby had called, was a ten-minute egg and thought that Santa Claus should be arrested for murder. Yet the instant Tubby had phoned him and said a blinded veteran was in trouble, Davis had snapped out, "Don't tell me, tell the story to Duncan Maclain!"

Tubby felt himself foundering when he tried to classify Duncan Maclain. The Captain didn't look blind, act blind or talk blind. His eyes were fixed on Tubby who was talking; and when the Captain nodded in agreement of some point now and again, Tubby had an eerie impression that he must be able to see. Tubby had reasons of his own for not wanting to be seen.

Tall and muscular, Maclain had greeted him at the door and walked

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across the office with him, moving with the lissome grace and surety of a well-trained boxer. Part of that confidence was explained when Tubby tried to shift a piece of furniture, and found it was fixed to the floor.

Tubby, who reacted strongly to people's faces, felt he had never seen one more expressive than Maclain's. "Ruggedly symmetrical" seemed to describe it better than anything. It was full of hills and valleys, reposeful for an instant, then lighting up in inquiry or indicating vividly amusement, interest, disbelief or patent unconcern.

Tubby wouldn't have picked him for much past forty, although he had read somewhere that the Captain, an intelligence officer, had been blinded in 1917 at Messines while attached to the British, gathering information for General Pershing, and must be much older. Yet, touches of gray at Maclain's temples and in his clipped black mustache were really the only indications that he was fifty-five or more.

Tubby lit a black cigar and began to puff it rapidly, squirming around uncomfortably in his chair. He looked at the German shepherd dog sleeping serenely by the Captain's feet. He looked at his watch.

It was twenty minutes to noon, almost twelve hours since Ted Yates had started shooting up lower Broadway.

Tubby looked at the braille books ranged in shelves along the wall. He looked at the talking books filed in their big black cases on shelves beside the Capehart.

His hands began to tremble. He hadn't had but a couple of slugs since breakfast. He'd come apart at the seams if he didn't get a drink pretty soon.

There was no sign of succor in this blind man's office. Police and anyone connected with them made him nervous. He had taken a long chance in coming here, an equally long one in phoning Davis. He couldn't afford chances. He got up and began to pace the floor. He tried to think of a good excuse. He had to get the hell out of there and head for the nearest bar.

"I'm being very inhospitable," said Duncan Maclain. He pushed back his chair with the effortless ease that characterized every one of his movements, walked to the wall by the diamond-paned French doors that led to the terrace and slid back a panel revealing a well-stocked bar.

Without a trace of fumbling he produced an ice tray from a built-in box, held it under the faucet of the bar sink and dumped the cubes into a silver ice bucket.

He turned toward Tubby and asked, "Bourbon, Scotch, or rye?"

Tubby came up to the bar beside him and had a look at the labels. "Bourbon — and since it's as good as that, straight, please, with a water chaser. Are you a mind reader or something? How did you guess I needed a

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drink? I was about to die."

"Sounds and smells," said Duncan Maclain. "I, too, have nervously paced the floor, lit one cigarette after another and kept standing up and sitting down when I felt the urge for a drink. The truth of the matter is, Mr. Severn, that you were acting much like a muscle dancer, and I knew you'd had a couple before you came in."

"Even your best friends won't tell you," Tubby muttered.

Maclain grinned and went on, "I was about to say it's getting close to lunch time and I was also getting dry. You'll probably prefer to fix your own." He unerringly picked a bottle of Dewar's White Label from the rack in front of him, poured himself a highball with soda and took it back to the desk where he sat down.

Tubby swallowed a quick one, chased it with another and drank a little water.

"I gathered from what you told me," said Duncan Maclain, "that you think this blinded veteran ran amuck or blew his top, as you so succinctly put it." He turned toward Tubby who was still at the bar. "I'm often a little repetitious. My secretary, Rena Savage, who is my partner's wife, is away. As a matter of fact, as I said on the phone, my wife and I are staying with them out on Long Island on their farm. I had a talk to make in town last night, so that's how you happened to catch me here this morning. What I'm leading up to is that I have Detecto-Dictographs set in the walls of this office, and a Webster tape recorder in the adjoining room is taking our entire conversation for the files.

Tubby said, "Well, for the record, I'll have another drink." He poured it and sat down, then asked the Captain, "Do you remember the case of the veteran who ran amuck in Camden a few years ago and shot several people for no reason at all?"

"Very well," said Maclain. "Meyer Berger wrote it up for the New York *Times* and got a Pulitzer Prize for his job, I believe. That boy in Camden may have been a schizophrenic, but he wasn't blind. How long have you known this Ted Yates, Mr. Severn?"

"Maybe twenty years — since he was a kid of five or six. His father, Harold Yates, has a brewery in Chicago. I was in business with him once, a long time ago."

"Have you ever noticed any peculiarities about Yates? Anything wrong?"

"Never. You can't graduate from West Point, can you, with peculiarities or anything wrong? He was an honor man in the class of 'forty-seven. Of course, there have been stretches when I wasn't in contact with him at all."

"But since he was blinded in Korea, you've seen him pretty steadily?"

"I visited him at Hines, where they process the blinded veterans. Then

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I saw him a couple of times after he left there while he was trying to work at his home."

"That's where?"

"Evanston, Illinois. He was trying to write and he has some talent, but the bosom of his family was a little too bosomy."

"Any other children?"

"None. He felt he had to get away. I agreed with him. So I persuaded him to come to New York where I got him a room in the Broadway Palace Hotel. I've lived there for a long time off and on."

"That's a real old-timer, isn't it — between Third and Fourth on Broadway?"

"It's full of ghosts," Tubby said, "Hettie Green, Fisk and Stokes. It gives me the creeps, but I'm used to it, I guess. It's quiet. I need quiet in my business."

"You operate a night club, you said?"

"The Merry-Go-Round, with my partner, Jake Patman."

"Now, about the shooting —" The Captain cut off Tubby with an upraised hand. "Is there any reason you know of why Yates should want to kill you?"

"Is there any reason they know of why that guy in Camden wanted to kill anyone?" Tubby asked. "The police seem sure Yates went nuts."

"Nobody was killed last night, were they?"

"No."

"Nobody was even hit?"

"No," Tubby admitted, "but a bullet sailed by six inches from my head and buried itself in the wall."

"Are you certain Yates fired the shot?"

"I'm not. The police are. That's why I'm here. Lots of people might be happier if I was out of the way, but I can't think of a reason in the world why Ted would want to harm me."

"Can you name some of those people who might have done the shooting?"

"Can, but don't want to," Tubby said. "I'll take it from the beginning again. Yates ate dinner at Billy the Oysterman's and then started pub crawling along Third Avenue, tying one on. By eleven o'clock he'd begun to get the heebie-jeebies. So he was drunk, scared and belligerent when he ducked into the bar."

"You saw him come into the bar?"

"Yes. He came in about half-past eleven and took a stool close by the door."

"Did you call to him or speak to him?"

"No."

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"Did anybody?"

"I don't think so," Tubby said. "There wasn't anybody near to him and the bartender was down at the other end of the bar. He came up and spoke to Ted, but that was all. I was at a table in a corner, about twenty feet away from the door."

"Back in the room?" the Captain asked. "I want to get this clear."

"No," Tubby told him. "I was sitting by a table that was right by the big glass casement window that runs all across the front of the bar. The hotel's on the west side of Broadway. Let's say I was sitting at a table about twenty feet uptown from the door that Ted came in. I was facing toward that door and the street end of the bar with my back to the wall and the window on my left-hand side."

"Alone?"

"A fellow named Jim Hyland had been with me but had left shortly before. He's the manager of Huck Hardesty's Health Farm up the Hudson in Philipstown. I'm way overweight, so I wrote up there to get some information and made an appointment to meet Hyland in the bar last night at half-past ten. Huck died in the spring of 1950 and Jim's running the place for Mrs. Hardesty and her daughters, Anne and Joan."

"Jim?" Maclain queried easily. "Was it one of those first-name friendships cemented in a bar, or had you known this Hyland before?"

"Frankly, Captain, there's something screwy about this deal." Tubby poured himself another drink and returned to his chair. "Did you ever hear of General Scanlon — Pierre 'Frenchy' Scanlon?"

"Murders are part of my business, unfortunately," the Captain said. "As I recall, in March, 1950, Scanlon was found shot to death in his compartment on the wrecked *Orange Limited*." The Captain's German shepherd guide dog that had been lying beside him stood up and stretched. He said, "Lie down, Schnucke." She forgot her seeing-eye discipline sufficiently to caress his fingers with a swift lick of her tongue before setting herself at his feet again.

"You made a remark about something being screwy, Mr. Severn," Maclain went on.

"Ted Yates was Scanlon's newly appointed aide." Tubby let his computing blue eyes, that seemed almost lashless due to the lightness of his hair, turn from Maclain to linger for a fraction of time on the bar. Deciding against it, he continued, "The police tried to hang the shooting on Yates, if you happen to remember."

"It's been over two years," Maclain reminded him. "I wasn't particularly interested, anyhow. Army officers take a chance on being shot, don't they?"

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"Not generals, and not on trains," Tubby said. "The *Orange Limited* cracked up out on the Jersey marshes in a snowstorm. I happened to be on it on my way to Washington to talk with the Food Commission. Yates was in the club car with a sergeant who gave him a perfect alibi. Yates said that he'd left his service automatic in the compartment where Scanlon was talking to a woman. A search of the wreckage and a quiz of the passengers failed to produce either the woman or Ted's gun."

"What's the screwy part?" The Captain drew an invisible triangle on his polished desk with the tip of his finger.

"Jim Hyland, the manager of Huck's, had known Scanlon before."

"Known him well?"

"I don't know how well. He'd served under him in Sicily and acted as Scanlon's driver for a while. Scanlon got him his job with Huck Hardesty."

"I knew Huck quite well," the Captain said. "Did you?"

"I never was up there and never met him," Tubby said. "I try to keep away from that club of mine, the Merry-Go-Round, so I had Hyland meet me in the bar of my hotel. He drove down from the health farm with Mrs. Hardesty and one of her daughters, Joan. I think they went to a show. Anyhow, Hyland and I loaded in a few and finally got to talking about Frenchy Scanlon."

"I'm not very clear as to where you knew Scanlon."

"He hung around the Merry-Go-Round a lot whenever he happened to be in town. I got to singing the *Marseillaise* because I remembered that Scanlon disliked it . . ."

"And you disliked Scanlon?" Maclain suggested.

"Along with most of the military age men in the country." Tubby said. "Silly, isn't it?"

"Nothing's quite as silly as murder," said Duncan Maclain. "You've been quite clear and explicit. The Broadway Palace bar is air-conditioned. As I get the picture you were shot at through an open pane in this casement window. Who opened the pane, Mr. Severn? They aren't usually opened in an air-conditioned room."

"Jim Hyland opened it shortly after he came in. He said the air-conditioning bothered him and he wanted some outside air."

"And Hyland left you just a few minutes before Lieutenant Yates came in?"

"Just a short while. I'm not sure how long. My voice sounded particularly fruity to me, so I was singing the *Marseillaise* again when Ted came in. It never occurred to me until just this minute that the sound of that song might have blown Ted, too."

"I wouldn't necessarily say a man had blown his top because he walked

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out of a bar." The Captain put one hand down flat on the desk top and left it there until he had finished speaking. "I'm blind, Mr. Severn, and I have a fair idea of what blind people think and do."

"That's why I'm consulting you, Captain."

"Fine," said Maclain. "I don't believe Ted Yates walked out of that bar, and without the faintest idea of how many people might be watching him, located an open window and fired through it at you. As a matter of fact, I think he unwittingly saved your life by startling whoever shot at you. Is he still at Bellevue?"

"The psych ward. The police grabbed him and he put up quite a fight before they got him into a strait jacket."

"I'm getting him out of there right now," said Duncan Maclain. "Are you coming with me?"

"I can't," Tubby said, "and there's one more thing. What about the gun?"

"Well, what about it?" Maclain demanded. "The police have it now, I suppose."

"Yes," said Tubby. "It's the forty-five that killed Scanlon on the *Orange Limited* two years ago. It's Ted's gun — registered to him, U. S. Army numbers and all. If Yates isn't lying, Captain, what I want to know is, where in hell did it come from?"

The phone rang.

Maclain answered. "Hello, Larry. . . . Yes — Severn's here with me now. . . . Ferri, huh? I'll tell him. How about going to Bellevue with me to get that blind boy out of there? . . . Good. I'll phone you at your office about two." He hung up.

"Was that Inspector Davis?" Tubby inquired.

The Captain nodded. "Jim Hyland's out of the picture. A taxi driver, Tony Ferri, told the police that Hyland was in his cab three blocks away from the shooting when it started last night."

"That makes it nice for Hyland, doesn't it?" said Tubby.

CHAPTER FOUR

TUBBY CAUGHT A CAB outside of Maclain's apartment building and gave the driver the address of the Merry-Go-Round on Fifty-first Street.

The cab moved off. Tubby lit a fresh cigar and sat back staring at the cabby's license and picture.

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S-c-h-o-l-z-g.

Where in hell did taxi drivers get their names? They must have all played football for Notre Dame.

Tony Ferri —

So good old Tony had given Jim Hyland an alibi. Well, that was one for the birds if he'd ever heard one!

Fink Ferri's bastard son doing a little double-crossing and at the same time sticking his fine Italian neck out far enough for a flock of crows to roost on! Or far enough for an ax to fall on?

Like father, like son — except Fink had never been yellow and Tony had been worse than a quarantine flag since he got out of the Army and married Rosa Mantini in Peekskill.

Marriage! That was the trouble. That was the finish of them all. Hell, couldn't they look back and see what had happened to that promising young punk, Myron Severn, when the gorgeous wide-eyed little bitch, Lola Easton, took him and Chicago by storm in 1920?

Couldn't they see what she'd done to Fink when he skipped with her to New York leaving her heartbroken young husband nothing but a chance to become slightly better than Al Capone? So they'd gotten Capone — but Severn was still doing fairly well! And Fink Ferri hadn't done too badly, either — after Lola finally landed where she belonged — eight to fifteen years in the New York state pen!

"May she rot in her little steel cell!" Tubby said half-aloud.

He carefully disposed of his cigar ash in the cluttered taxi ashtray and pulled the fine Havana into a better glow.

Nine hundred thousand bucks! But he wasn't going to try like most dopes to run it into a million. He'd had two bad breaks — one when Laura Dale had died under that lousy quack, Doc Husenby, and a second when Ted was blinded. He loved them both, but nobody would ever believe it. When you started loving people it was time to quit.

His job right now was taking care of the kid — outside of that he was through. He was quitting clean — and nobody, including Tony Ferri or Joe Dale, was going to stop him. Joe would know that Laura's death wasn't Tubby's fault — that is, if he had an ounce of brains. Certainly Joe loved his only daughter, but Tubby had loved her, too, and Joe was acting like a goddam fool! . . .

Tubby paid off the cab in front of the Merry-Go-Round and went into the bar through a side entrance. It was cooler than outside and beginning to be crowded with the regular lunchtime group.

An automatic elevator took him up to the third floor. At the end of a heavily carpeted hall he went into Jake Patman's office.

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Jake was working on a two-decker sandwich of corned beef and pickles and a glass of buttermilk set down in a nest of cleared away papers on a pine roll-top desk. He was slightly taller than average, with a thin, almost ascetic face that was florid enough to make his iron-gray hair look white. His hands were delicate and well kept. He had his coat on in spite of the stifling smoke-filled office.

A withered little man with watery eyes and unkempt hair was talking almost in Jake's ear. His whiskey-soaked voice cut off a word halfway when Tubby came in.

Jake finished a mouthful of sandwich, washed it down with buttermilk, and lifted his head long enough to greet Tubby by pleasantly crinkling his gray-blue eyes.

The little man ran a grimy finger around the neckband of his soiled collarless shirt and started to speak again.

Jake said, "No dice." His voice was low and pleasing to the ear.

"But I kin put it acrost, Jake —" The whiskey voice became a whine.

Jake took a swallow of buttermilk, touched his lips with a large white handkerchief and said, "Beat it."

The little man stood up. "Jesus, Jake, don't I git nuttin?"

"Tell Skeets on the bar to give you a shot and a small beer, and that the next time you come in he's to throw you out."

"Aw, Jake —"

"Beat it." Jake looked up suddenly and raised his white eyebrows. The little man skittered past Tubby and out the door.

Jake said, "Catch yourself that other chair in the corner, Tubs. I wouldn't chance the one that louse was using. He's scratchy." He reached out with one foot and shoved the chair away.

Tubby replaced it with the other and sat down.

Jake said, "Food?"

"Double Bourbon."

"You'd better eat, Tubs. It's no good."

"Don't police me, Jake. I couldn't keep a sandwich down."

"It's your belly." Jake pushed a button beside the desk, two long rings. "You're sweating like a beer vat. I can see the outline of your gun."

Tubby mopped his forehead and shoved the clip holster back farther under his arm. A page boy with brass buttons brought up a double Bourbon already mixed with ice and soda. Tubby flipped him half a dollar.

He said, "Thanks, Mr. Severn," and went out.

Tubby drained half the glass in three big gulps, set it down on Jake's desk and mopped his forehead again.

"I'm quitting, Jake."

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"So? Who took the flash at you last night, or is it private?"

"Ferri, maybe."

"Yeah, maybe," Jake said, "if you say so. If anyone inquires, shall I tell them it was Ferri Papa or Ferri Son?"

"Tell them nothing."

"That would be about everything I know, Tubs — if it happens to be about you. Now if it was about your wife —"

"Lola?" Tubby's voice was suddenly as cold as the highball glass on Jake's desk. "What about her?"

"If you think she died in the pen, you're wrong. She was paroled in 'thirty-eight and dropped off probation in 'forty-five. She's been living out West some place — address unknown. I thought maybe she got mad about something and took that crack at you last night."

"This is a hell of a late hour to let me know."

"I just heard it, Tubs, from that weasel who was in here."

"Oh." Tubby finished his highball. "Look, Jake, how much dough of mine do you have in the banks and on hand?"

"Close to eighty grand, Tubs. Do you need it?"

"No. There's a will in back of the picture over the mantel in room three-twenty at the Broadway Palace Hotel. If anything happens to me the dough with you goes to Ted Yates, a blinded veteran, and his father and mother — Harold Yates — in Evanston, Illinois. Look, Jake. I'm going up to Huck Hardesty's for a while. When I'm all set I'll let you know."

"You'd better get set soon." Jake sipped his buttermilk and wiped his lips again. "That nice clean young man with the Justice Department hairdo was around again this morning asking after the health of Matt Snowden. I sent him down to see Sam Weisman, the brilliant attorney."

"I'm going up to Huck's under my own steam and my own name," Tubby said very distinctly.

Jake whistled softly. "I'll be watching the death notices, Tubby, and wondering if it will be Snowden, Weisman or you!"

CHAPTER FIVE

IT WAS PROBABLY somewhere near the middle of the night, or maybe nearly morning. Ted Yates didn't give a damn.

He was floating around in a nauseating sea of yellow dots that shut off all the sunlight, stopped up his mouth and nostrils so he couldn't breathe,

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bound him so he couldn't move. He might have been drowning in a sea of rancid fat, except for the fact that a drowning man could struggle, make an attempt by threshing wildly to reach the surface of whatever horrible mass he was sinking in, and there before he finally died be rewarded for his struggle by filling his aching lungs with a breath of air.

For a while he lay and thought about death. Something was wrapped around him preventing any movement, a sheet or a shroud. Weren't they the same?

He couldn't be dead, for dead men didn't feel pain. Or did they? Maybe he was getting the answer to that right now.

Sure, that was it. The train had cracked up. Frenchy was dead back in the next car. How long had he been pinned there? An hour? Two hours? Christ, he couldn't move! He should be with Frenchy.

How did you get to be a general's aide? Sheer ability, boy, sheer ability! You saw that the general was present when you got a break and won the Army-Navy football game. Then you met the general for dinner in the hotel that night and introduced him to Joan. Flirtation Walk. Flirtation — hell!

He'd be a general himself someday. Hadn't he planned it all out with Joan?

He could pick her out of a thousand girls watching parades at the Point. The way she stood. The way she laughed. The way she knew he was looking at her without moving his eyes as his company passed her by.

General Ted Yates! General Disability! In my plastic eye!

So he hadn't written and didn't intend to, and he hadn't seen her since he came back, and didn't intend to. That was good for a bof! He couldn't see her if he wanted to — too much had happened in between.

But he could see that night on the New Jersey marshes. So right this minute he was either dead or some place else.

He could see the rescue workers and the dead and maimed in the wreckage of the club car. And Tubby helping them free the bodies, working like a dog along with all the other workers, his usually jovial face showing grim in the light of the creeping flame.

He was either dead or he had flipped his lid. He had eyes that night in New Jersey and the hospital in Newark had been clean and light.

Korea! That was it. He had it now. He wasn't dead. He was dreaming, the same old dream from too much liquor and sleeping pills. You couldn't see when you lost your eyes and he could see perfectly.

Robert Service — "The Shooting of Dangerous Dan McGrew."

"— And the icy mountains hem you in with a silence you most can hear."

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Creep, Lieutenant, creep, creep, creep. The corporal with the mine detector will find the mines, or you'll find out if sometimes he misses one. You're not getting out of this pocket anyhow unless you knock out that damned machine gun.

A nightmare, Ted. Don't you know it by now? Why go through the whole thing again when you've lived it so many times before?

He couldn't see the icy mountains without his eyes. The groans and mutterings all around him were the groans of the wounded and dying. Any minute he'd wake up now and find that he could really see.

Ted tried out his other senses. Sometimes he could force himself awake and get out of the trap by touching some dreamlike object, tasting a piece of ephemeral food, sniffing strong at some wraithlike odor, or listening to a demon's yell. The effort would bring back reality. Snap him out of the slumberous Gehenna where the shades of mental torture dwell.

Touch.

He could wiggle his toes and move his feet the slightest bit. But the only thing it told him was that the winding sheet was tight against his skin. He could feel that it bound his right hand, too, tight against his naked thigh. His left-hand fingers could move a little, just enough to touch the right-hand nipple on his naked chest. But it took a lot of strength to make the try. He could raise his head an inch or two from the roughness of a pillow. The effort was far from worth it.

The yellow dots grew thicker, turning themselves into an overwhelming vortex. He cautiously lowered his head again and let it lie.

Taste.

The sickish sweet taste of anesthetic clung cloyingly against the inside of his mouth. His tongue felt swollen, hot and dry.

Smells.

The sickening reek of formaldehyde, paraldehyde, and an overtone of ether. The noxious battle of septic and antiseptic putrefying the dead hot air. Septic bodies. Septic throats. Septic nostrils. Septic brains. Septic toilets. Remnants of food. Remnants of humanity. Defecated sheets. Floors that constant washing could never clean. Overtones of cheap tobacco smoked today and long ago. All of them heroically combined to rout the antiseptic in one glorious charge of smell.

Sounds.

Someone muttering, "Oh, merciful mother, Lady of Grace, pray for me. Oh, merciful mother —" over and over.

Men snoring.

Men groaning.

Men crying like babies.

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Somewhere in the midst of it all the frightened sobbing of a boy.

A cracked voice, neither male nor female, screaming, "Shut up, goddamit, shut up, shut up, shut up!"

Bedlam!

The curtain lifted inside of Ted's mind, lining up events in their proper sequence. The wreck and Frenchy's shooting. The land mine in Korea. The evac hospital. Valley Forge. The training at Hines. His move to New York.

He tried to free himself from the sheet and groaned.

Footsteps sounded — stopped beside his bed.

"You awake, buddy?"

"Yes," Ted said. "I want to get out of here. Who are you?"

"Ned Primus, an orderly. Hear you had a battle with the cops and got knocked down."

"They took several pieces of metal out of me from a land mine six months ago, but they didn't put me in a strait jacket," Ted said. "I want to get out of here."

"You'll have to wait until morning."

"What time is it now?"

"Nearly four. We start washing up at five-thirty, then you'll get some breakfast and the doctor will be on."

"Take me out of this sheet," Ted said.

Primus walked to the foot of the bed and took a look at a chart on a board. Ted heard it clink as he let it fall.

More footseps came up and another voice said to Primus, "That guy's blind."

Primus said, "Yes, I know." Primus asked Ted, "Do you need a bottle or a bed pan?"

"I can't sleep in this stinking sheet," Ted told him.

"This'll help you." Primus pulled the top of a sheet down around Ted's right shoulder. A hypodermic skillfully punctured Ted's arm.

He heard the other voice say, "He blew his top and shot a lot of people."

"Well, what do you know?"

Ted managed to get out, "That's a goddam lie!" before he sank down into the mass of yellow dots again and started drowning himself in unconsciousness once more.

He felt better when he woke up again.

The pain in his head had dulled. A resident doctor came around, asked him a few questions and went away.

A little later an orderly who had just come on duty freed him from the restraining sheet, led him to the toilet at the end of the ward and put him

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back to bed again. The sheet wasn't put back on.

Breakfast came, but Ted's stomach was in a turmoil. With the orderly's help he managed to get a little weak watery coffee down. He lay flat on his back, building up terrible mental pictures. Tin cups and tin plates rattled and clattered. In a corner a man was laughing, but the laughter was maniacal.

All around him people ate, not with the friendly noises of a restaurant, but sucking and slobbering and making noises that grew into an animalistic growl.

Later, people came and stood by his bed. Some just looked. One talked rapidly to him in Italian until others led him away. One crept up so quietly that Ted didn't hear him until he whispered in Ted's ear, "I've been here a hundred years. You'll be here a hundred years." The maniacal laughter broke out at Ted's startled jump and grew louder and louder right beside him until two orderlies came and took the laughter away.

Sometime during the morning a riot broke out. There was yelling, screaming, laughing and cursing, and the air was full of flying objects. Then just as quickly as the noise had begun it was quiet again.

After a while Ted heard the clang of the two metal doors that made a vestibule at the end of the ward, shutting out the world of sanity from those who were shut within.

The sounds made the picture vivid. Something that had been moaning down on the floor was loaded onto a stretcher and carted away.

Ted yelled for the orderly and when the man came up he asked, "Was anyone hurt?"

"Just a fit," the orderly said. "Somebody throws one every few hours and it always starts them going. Don't let it get you."

"Look," Ted said, "I'm just as sane as you are, but I won't be if I stay here long. Somebody socked me last night, and these idiots think I tried to commit suicide because I picked up the gun that fell at my feet and blasted at whoever it was when he started to run."

The orderly went to the foot of the bed and studied the chart. "Are you totally blind?"

"Both eyes," Ted said. "Now I haven't even got my plastic ones."

"They're probably checked at the office with the rest of your things." The orderly sat down on the edge of the bed, lit a cigarette and gave it to Ted.

Ted said, "Thanks, I was dying for one. How do I get out?"

"Does your family know you're here?"

"They're in Chicago."

"Friends in town?"

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"Tubby Severn, who owns the Merry-Go-Round. He's the only one."

The orderly got up and gave Ted an empty tin can. "Put your ashes and butt in here. I'm going to talk to Dr. Kriederman. She's the chief psychiatrist. Why'd you beat up the cops who grabbed you?"

"Somebody fired a shot," Ted said. "I can't see. I didn't know what I was doing. I was scared. I'd have started a fight with anyone. Wouldn't you?"

"I don't know what I'd do if I was blind," the orderly said. "I hope I never will be. I do know this. Very few land in this joint unless they belong here. But however they land here, getting them out is some fun."

Ted had been there fully a hundred years when the orderly came back again. A lunch had passed that he couldn't eat. His braille watch was gone with his plastic eyes. He was growing hysterically apathetic. One more night in the place would kill him. He'd heard nothing further about Dr. Kriederman and it was already getting along well into the afternoon.

The orderly said, "Here's your shirt and pants. I'll help you put them on."

"Am I going to see Dr. Kriederman?"

"No," said the orderly. "There's a blind man with a seeing-eye dog and an inspector of police waiting for you out in the anteroom. The blind man says he's Captain Duncan Maclain."

"He's a detective," Ted said.

"He's a wizard," the orderly said, "to get you out of here without seeing Kriederman." The orderly rustled papers. "He has release orders from the mayor, the head of Veterans Administration, the commissioner of police, and the superintendent of hospitals. You're being released on his responsibility. In other words, toots, you're sprung."

"You might add," said Ted, "that I'm also slightly unstrung."

CHAPTER SIX

THE ORDERLY was wrong in one respect.

Ted still had to pass the analytical brain of Dr. Christina Kreiderman.

It didn't take too long.

Out of the doctor's carefully chosen questions Ted got one thing: The gun that did the shooting the night before was his own.

"If it is," Ted said, "then it's the gun that killed Scanlon. I don't blame you for thinking I'm nuts. I didn't know until now that Tubby was shot at. Was he hurt?"

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"He wasn't hit." Maclain went on to tell Ted the rest of the story.

"Only an idiot would keep a gun around for two long years that could send him to the chair," Ted said after a little.

"Maybe the idea was to send you to the chair," said Duncan Maclain.

"Can he go now, doctor?" Inspector Davis asked.

"There's nothing to hold him here for. He's as sane as you or Maclain."

"Probably more so," said Duncan Maclain. "Come on, Ted. We'll get the rest of your clothes from the office. My car and chauffeur are outside. I'll drive you back to your room at the Broadway Palace. We're meeting Tubby there for cocktails and dinner."

Dr. Kriederman took Ted's hand and said, "Good luck!"

"Thanks," Ted said, "I may need it."

He went out with the Inspector and Duncan Maclain, but the night in Bellevue had left a scar that would ache again and again.

Another attendant took them in charge at the door of the doctor's office. An elevator took them downstairs several flights. They came out into a cryptlike coolness, walked an endless distance through tunnels pervaded with a cryptlike smell and climbed stairs to stop at last at a grilled window in a waiting room.

An impersonal man gave Ted his wallet, his plastic eyes, the rest of his clothes and his aluminum cane. The attendant left. Inspector Davis and the Captain waited in silence while Ted put his things on.

There were more corridors, more stairs, and then the blistering afternoon sun and the overwhelming noise of traffic on First Avenue.

Maclain said, "Broadway Palace Hotel, Cappo."

Ted sank back into the comfort of the cushions in the Captain's Cadillac limousine.

His own gun! They'd found his holster and belt in the compartment with Frenchy's body, but the gun had certainly gone. Every inch of the wreckage had been searched, all the passengers and what was left of their baggage, every inch of the ground for a mile around the train.

"It's not only impossible, it doesn't make sense," Ted blurted out.

"If you're talking about your gun, I'm inclined to agree," the Inspector said.

"Anything's possible if it happened." The Captain laughed. "You're not thinking very clearly, Ted, and after a night in the hatch I don't blame you. It does make sense. It couldn't very well have been your gun if it had been found in the wreckage of the train."

"There are moments when I find you very obnoxious," Davis said. "I've handled quite a few murder cases. Even your hardened professional killer ditches a murder gun."

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"As it was ditched last night," said Duncan Maclain. "There are times when you find me obnoxious and other times when you give *me* a pain. Now you're thinking like Dr. Kriederman — Ted must be guilty because his own gun is the only one involved. Also in addition to putting another notch on her case sheet, she'll be helping this poor blinded veteran by proving he's insane."

"You're not very fair," the inspector muttered.

"That's because I have no holes in my head that I'm able to look out of," said Maclain. "Will you accept the fact that Ted didn't kill the general, that he didn't try to get Tubby last night, and that although he had his eyes blown out in Korea he's still not insane?"

"Who helped you to get him out of Bellevue?" Davis inquired.

"You did. So be consistent. First, you say Scanlon's killer took the gun, kept it two years and used it again. Then last night the same killer ditched the carefully preserved gun beside Ted instead of shooting him when he had every chance to, thereby tying himself up with Scanlon's shooting that he had gotten away with clean. Then you come up with a smoke screen that the first procedure of taking the gun and keeping it is inconsistent with good murder practice."

"I'm sticking to the facts we know," Davis told him.

"To the facts you know about the gun," Maclain said. "You can see the gun. I can't. But so far none of us has seen the person, or persons, who used the gun on Scanlon, kept it for two years, shot at Tubby with it last night, and dumped it. My theories may be as good as yours — when they are concerned with people that neither of us can see."

"Persons." Davis made a noise with his lips. "Theories. One person isn't good enough for you. Why drag in more?

"Because actions that may be inconsistent for one may be very consistent when carried out by two or three," the Captain explained.

"My aching head!" said Davis. "Now two isn't enough, so you make it three."

"Can you prove there was only one?"

"No."

"Then let's assume that the killer left the gun beside Scanlon's body, and that someone else found it and kept it."

"Who and why?"

"We don't know who," the Captain said, "so let's call him Mr. Two. He might have liked Ted Yates very much, and equally hated Scanlon. He might have thought that Ted killed Scanlon and that the gun was very incriminating. So Mr. Two took the gun. It helped exonerate Ted completely on Scanlon's murder, you'll have to admit. Add to it the fact that Ted was

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pinned down in the adjoining car with a witness to prove it, and he was absolutely clear. Not only could he have not shot Scanlon, but he couldn't have disposed of the missing gun."

The Inspector didn't say anything.

"Then there might be another good reason for Mr. Two taking the gun," Maclain went on thoughtfully. "He might have known, or made a good guess, about the identity of the killer. We can call the killer Mr. One. So Mr. Two took it for the same reason Homicide would take it and impound it, hoping to find fingerprints, which they rarely do, hoping to use it as evidence, or maybe for blackmail over the killer, Mr. One. Find out, Larry, who was there who liked Ted Yates, or who might have known who the murderer was, and you'll probably find the identity of both Mr. Two and Mr. One."

"Thanks a million," Davis said. "Now you've gone into the numbers racket!"

The Inspector was chewing his gray mustache when the Cadillac stopped in an area clearly marked *No Parking* in front of the Broadway Palace Grill.

"Okay, why didn't he shoot Ted when he had every chance to?"

"He either knew that Ted was blind and couldn't possibly identify him, or he liked Ted too much to want to hurt him badly — or both," said Duncan Maclain.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CAPTAIN'S one regret in life was that dogs grew older faster than people. He always kept two — a guide dog trained to work on his left and a protective police dog trained to work on his right — so that on the rare occasions when he found it necessary he could use them both together.

It was a little matter of self-deception and also of sentiment that his guide dogs had been named Schnucke and his police dogs, Dreist. Those were the names bestowed on the very first pair he had ever owned by Jack Humphreys the trainer at the Seeing-Eye Home in Whippany, New Jersey.

It was Humphreys who had also persuaded him to use two dogs instead of one. Not that a guide dog couldn't be trained for guiding and protective police work, too. It was only that the combination might be a very risky one.

The German shepherd was picked for seeing-eye work because as a breed it is gentle and has worked with men in the fields tending sheep for over

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two hundred years. With hundreds of them leading blind people in this country and abroad there has never been a case on record of a seeing-eye dog's biting anyone.

Inspector Davis could still remember twenty years back when Spud Savage, the Captain's partner, had gone into one of his regular tirades about idiots who couldn't or wouldn't make a distinction between a police dog and a German shepherd.

"Let me put you straight, Inspector," Spud had yelled at Davis. "There's no such dog as a police dog. Take a bulldog and train it for police work and it's a police dog. Take a Doberman pinscher, train it for trailing and use it in the police department, and it's a police dog. Take a German shepherd, the gentlest, kindliest, most intelligent dog in the world, and spend week after week in heartbreaking labor training it to obey every command and to bite, if you can train it to bite, and you have a police dog.

"But it takes months of training at Mount Pelerin in Switzerland to make one. Then he'll work only with Dunc and me, and both of us had to have weeks of special instruction with him in New Jersey before he was released to our custody.

"His first duty is to protect us against assault, and never allow anything to come between him and either of us without our instructions. He'll stand, lie, or sit down instantly at command, and stay there for hours while we're away.

"He's been taught to bite, but not to tear. He can jump an obstacle eight feet high and clear ten to twelve feet in width. He'll carry and fetch over obstacles or through fire and water. He can find something by nose work that has been thrown away hours before.

"But the most difficult task, Inspector, is to teach this dog to bite. Weeks of play with a gunny sack. Then a sack-covered pad on the arm of a man. And when the German shepherd is finally trained as a police dog and learns to bite he's doing something that every instinct in him cries out against doing."

So the combination of trained police dog and trained guide dog in one gentle German shepherd was a bad one. The Captain liked to compare it to a blind man walking around the city and using a loaded rifle for a cane.

Schnucke, his guide dog, was gentle as a little child. Dreist, his police dog, dangerous as a loaded gun. Both were German shepherds.

Schnucke IV was leading him now, and Dreist IV was in his kennel on the terrace of the penthouse apartment. The first pair had died many years before. The others had been retired to Spud and Rena's farm on Long Island.

Each new pair had meant additional weeks of work for the Captain before they were properly broken in and he completely adjusted to them. But

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Schnucke was his eyes and Driest his life in the hazardous profession he had taken on to prove to himself that a life of blindness could be a life worth living. And as a man will love his eyes and life, the Captain loved his German shepherds.

He had vanished into the Broadway Palace Grill before Ted and the Inspector were out of the car. They found him running his supple fingers along the panes of the casement window under the curious gaze of the bartender and the half-dozen customers who were drinking at the bar.

Ted said, "I'm going upstairs and get washed up. Where do we meet Tubby?"

"In his rooms at five," the Captain said. "We have an hour. Show me one thing, Ted — just where you were at the bar last night and as near as you can place it where you were when the shot was fired."

Ted showed him, and left the Captain feeling the outside of the casement window.

He went to the desk, got his key and went on up to his room.

Maclain paced off the width of the window — six good steps — then joined Inspector Davis at the bar.

"Where's the bullet hole, Larry?"

The Inspector took him over and put his finger on the hole, about three feet up from the floor in the wainscoted wall.

The Captain pulled out a chair from the table close beside him and sat down. "Make mine Scotch and soda, Larry." The Captain tossed a bill on the table and added, "Lie down, Schnucke."

Davis came back with a couple of drinks from the bar, put them on the table and took a chair facing Maclain.

"I'm where Tubby sat." The Captain sipped his drink. "You're where Jim Hyland had been sitting. Close the pane in the casement window beside you. You turn that crank right by your right hand. I felt it as I went along. It's still open just wide enough to shoot through."

Davis tried it and said, "The damned thing's stuck."

"Let's remember that," said Duncan Maclain. "I don't think Hyland opened that. I don't think he could have. I think it was opened and jammed purposely several days ago. Go out and take a look at me, Larry."

The Inspector went out, took a look and came back in. He sat down in his chair again.

People stared from the bar.

"I'd have had to crouch 'way down to aim," the Inspector said. "If I did that, the gun would be just across the table from you, almost point blank."

"But whoever shot at Tubby didn't have time to crouch." The Captain

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swished his ice around and took another swallow. "Do you know the theory of shooting at sound?"

"I know we train the loft squad to do it," Davis said. "It's handy in a gun fight in a warehouse. At night when you hear a gun blast out in back of you, it's a comforting feeling to be able to turn around and take an accurate pot shot at the sound."

"I've spent twenty-five years practicing it," the Captain said. "It's a matter of getting the muscles trained to a place where they automatically keep your arm and gun in a coordinated line with the medial plane of your hearing."

"I'll pass it along to the loft squad, Davis said. With a dictionary."

"Or to put it more simply," the Captain continued, "you have to do with your ears what the sighted quail hunter has learned to do automatically with his eyes — let them control the throw of your gun and the pull of your trigger finger. This is the only case on record I know of, Larry, where a man's life was saved because the person firing at him point blank had eyes."

"I'll play stooge," the Inspector said, "but if you think I'm going back to Homicide with a report that you've definitely cleared Ted Yates because a blind man shooting at Tubby Severn's voice would have killed him, you're nuttier than a fruitcake."

"Yet it's quite true, Larry," the Captain said gently. "I could prove it if you wanted me to by having you sit here and sing while I shoot at you through the window. Or I'll make a bet Ted Yates can hit you if you want to try it with him. What I'm really trying to prove to you through all your sarcasm is that the person who shot at Tubby last night is a darn good shot. If they'd shot where they were listening they'd have hit him. Instead of that they shot where they were looking, and missed him because while their hand with the gun was stuck through the opening, they were looking at Tubby on an angle through the watery glass of a window pane."

"I'll make a note to blind all our marksmen after this and furnish them with dark glasses and a tin cup and a cane." The Inspector slowly finished his drink, then looked at his watch. "I have to get back to headquarters. I'll put it on the line and you can answer as you want to without entirely committing yourself, as I know you hate to do. Could Tubby Severn be this character that coming over here in the car you were so coyly referring to as Mr. Two?"

"He could." The Captain lit a cigarette. "He told me this morning that he didn't like Scanlon."

"If he took the gun, couldn't he have bumped off Scanlon, too?"

"It won't fit, Larry. He didn't shoot at himself last night or knock down Yates."

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"Then how was the gun used against him last night if Tubby had it in his possession?"

"Maybe Tubby kept the gun for bait," said Duncan Maclain. "And Scanlon's killer took it from Tubby and finding out he was neatly caught, turned the gun on Tubby."

The Inspector looked at the bullet hole in the wall by the Captain's head. "Do you remember the song in World War I — 'Keep Your Head Down, Fritzi Boy'?"

"I vass dere, too, Larry!"

"I have a new verse," Davis said. "If you want to make more money in your restaurant — keep your head down, Tubby boy!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE CAPTAIN WENT out to the curb with Davis and told Cappo to drive the Inspector to headquarters, then return to the apartment and wait for word from him.

"Are you going back to Long Island tonight, Captain?" Cappo's black face was a study. Duncan Maclain was his personal responsibility. He hadn't been happy about Bellevue Hospital. He was never overly pleased when Maclain became involved with Davis. His appearance invariably spelled trouble.

Cappo Marsh wasn't any more superstitious than the average person, but he believed in luck. He'd been shot three times in twenty years while in the Captain's service. He'd seen Spud Savage get it twice, plus a knife wound in his stomach that had left an ugly scar.

The Captain seemed to take a delight in sticking his neck into danger. He had been close to death too many times to suit Cappo.

Now Cappo had another worry. In the six years since the Captain's marriage, Cappo had developed a great admiration and respect for Sybella Maclain. He felt that it wasn't quite fair to her for Maclain to continue to push his luck too far.

"I don't know exactly when I'm going back to Long Island," the Captain told him. "I'm a little worried about Mr. Yates, the boy we picked up at the hospital. He was let out in my care."

The Inspector spoke from the back of the car. "Say the word and I'll put an around-the-clock guard on him."

"If you tell him, he won't let you." The Captain ran his hand through

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his graying dark hair. "If you put one on without telling him, he'll know he's being followed and get more nervous than he is right now."

"So the guard's out, then," the Inspector said. "What do you want me to do?"

"Nothing for the moment." The Captain reached a sudden decision. "Wait until I talk to Tubby. He was going up to Huck Hardesty's Health Farm for a couple of weeks to lose some weight. If I can talk Yates into it I may take him up there as my guest for a couple of weeks. Phone Mrs. Maclain, Cappo, and tell her that we won't be out tonight, but that I'll call her in the morning."

"And what's really back of this great inspiration to take Yates up to the health farm?" Davis inquired.

"He'll be safe from the New York police," said Duncan Maclain.

Cappo scowled at the general appearance of the Broadway Palace Hotel and muttered, "Yes, sir, Captain. Anybody who'd knock down one blind man might get twice the fun out of knocking down two."

The Cadillac rolled off down Broadway.

The Captain stood for a moment in silence before he ordered Schnucke around and went back into the bar.

When the bartender asked for his order he ordered another Scotch and soda and found himself a stool. His braille watch told him half-past four. Munching pretzels and sipping his drink he blanked his mind to the maudlin chatter going on around him, went back to Scanlon and the railroad wreck and started to think things through.

People with eyes in a railroad wreck were staring all about them, seeing flames and the steam and the blood on the snow, and the maimed humanity suffering. But their eyes were taking nothing in, for their eyes were intent on the passengers. Only those who had been in the wreck existed — the killed, the injured, and the lucky. Only they existed to those people who had eyes to see.

And what of the others? Could a passenger afterwards remember more than one of the forty doctors, the one who had directly attended him? Could he remember that one?

It was doubtful, for doctors like the policemen, the nurses, the Red Cross workers, the stretcher bearers, the firemen, the reporters, and the thousands of anonymous watchers gathered from afar at the scene of tragedy, didn't exist as individuals. To one involved with eyes to see, they were only background, like heat or cold, clouds or the stars, rain or snow. Only the passengers were real — for they were the ones who were in the act. You couldn't be real and be part of a painted background in the scene.

So Davis was right.

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The Captain washed down the dryness of a munched-up pretzel with a thoughtful swallow.

Davis had added something more that the Captain hadn't thought of. If Tubby was the one who had taken the gun and gotten away without being searched, then Tubby could have shot General Scanlon.

But so could any one of the other supernumeraries who were milling around the wreckage. What was sauce for the goose was sauce for the gander. Suppose the killer was a doctor, a policeman, a fireman or a reporter — he wouldn't have been searched if Tubby hadn't been. But suppose he thought that Tubby had seen him, so he kept the gun and two years later it came to light that Tubby had really seen him. And somebody else had seen him, too. A fellow named Yates. And Yates and Tubby got together. And this doctor, policeman, fireman, reporter — murderer — didn't happen to know that Yates, who had seen him, had been blinded in Korea.

"It might be time to use the gun that he'd kept two years," the Captain muttered, and crumpled a pretzel to powder. "But how could he know Yates would come out of the bar?"

"Did you say something?" the bartender asked from almost directly in front of him.

"I believe I said, 'I'm a son of a gun!' " The Captain swallowed the rest of his drink, put down a dollar and added, "Keep the change because I ruined so many of your pretzels."

It was ten to five.

The Captain went to the desk in the office and asked for Mr. Severn.

A pleasant clerk consulted the key rack and said, "His key's not here, but I think he's out. Just a minute." He turned and asked the switchboard operator to buzz 320.

"He's out," the clerk reported, "but he left word that you were to wait in his rooms. He never locks them anyhow."

"Trusting soul," the Captain murmured.

The clerk laughed. "The Broadway Palace hasn't been a gold mine for thieves for a good many years. Our crime rate is low."

The Captain said, "I hope what happened in the bar last night won't bring it up to level."

The clerk hit a bell. A boy came and took the Captain up two flights in a creaky elevator, then led the way down a wide, musty, heavily carpeted hall. Without bothering to knock he opened the door and showed him into 320 and said, "There's a chair right in front of you. Want some ice?"

"I'll wait until Mr. Severn comes, thank you." The Captain gave him a quarter and heard him close the door.

The Captain stood without moving until he heard the clang of the

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elevator door and the creak of cables as it started down.

Even then he was statuelike for a minute more before he ordered Schnucke forward. She took him around an overstuffed chair and halted him close to a wall.

His fingers touched two panels, followed one down, found a knob and turned it. He stopped again on the threshold of an open door. He released Schnucke's brace, stepped inside, and found the foot of a double bed.

Moving very cautiously he traced it around toward the sound of the stertorous breathing that he had heard in the other room. His moving foot came in contact with another pair of feet dangling awkwardly on the floor.

He picked them up and put them on the bed. They belonged to a heavy man and the Captain realized how Tubby had gotten his nickname. Straightening out his unconscious form, getting him out of his linen coat and putting a pillow under his head was something of an effort.

When he was straightened out, the Captain removed his shoes, took off his tie and loosened his collar. That done, he took a .38 automatic from an armpit holster under the sleeping man's left arm and put it his pocket.

He went back into the sitting room, shut the door and started a tour of fast exploring.

A flat-top desk held a typewriter, scattered papers, and a scrapbook full of clippings. It had a single tier of drawers on the right. The Captain opened them one by one and took a "look" inside with his fingers. Typewriter ribbon, clips, a bottle of fountain-pen ink, rubber bands, a package of pencils, writing paper and envelopes, four smelly pipes, and a half-empty can of expensive tobacco.

He hefted the can and put it back.

Ted Yates came in as he closed the bottom drawer.

"Is that you, Captain?"

"Yes," said Maclain. "You feeling okay?"

"Tops," Ted said. He located a chair and sat down.

The Captain started on the mantel and brushed over a China Buddha, lifted up a feather-light ornament in the shape of a bamboo Japanese house and smelled it.

He asked Ted, "Was Tubby ever in Japan?"

"For a while, I believe," Ted told him.

"I was looking around," the Captain explained. "Have you ever been over his things? This Buddha on the mantelpiece came from China. But there are two little houses on here that I believe are trick boxes, hard to open unless you know how. In the middle of the mantel he has an open Japanese fan. It's interesting because I can almost see it by tracing the out-

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lines of Fujiyama."

The Captain found the mate to the first Japanese box and lifted it. It was heavy. He took it to the desk and sat down.

"Tubby was also in Korea, wasn't he?"

"For a short time. Some sort of Food Commission, I believe. He still has the thirty-eight automatic he took along."

"Yes," said the Captain. He found the trick of the Japanese house, opened it and took a full box of cartridges out of the little drawer.

"You're as blind as I am," he said to Ted. "Here's a box of cartridges for his thirty-eight. Feel them and tell me if anything strikes you as being wrong."

Ted took them and ran his forefinger over the solid mass of the tightly packed cartridges.

"They're packed too tightly for one thing," he said after a moment.

"Why?" The Captain waited.

"They're packed too tight because forty-two of them are thirty-eights and the other eight are forty-fives," Ted said. "That's what's wrong." His voice took on a peculiar note. "I wonder what's keeping Tubby. It's five-fifteen."

"Nothing's keeping him," the Captain said. "He's on the bed in the other room."

"Ill?"

"I call it ill," the Captain said. "Most people would call it stinking drunk. That's another thing that's wrong."

CHAPTER NINE

THE CAPTAIN TOOK the eight forty-fives from the box of thirty-eights, put them in an envelope and put the envelope in his pocket. He returned the remaining thirty-eights to the Japanese box and the box to its place on the mantelpiece.

"So he had my gun." Ted's voice was bitter. His lighter flashed and clicked out again. The smell of a new-lit cigarette was on the air.

"I used to have that same tendency to jump to conclusions." The Captain sat down. "It's a tendency of blindness, Ted. Now, even after thirty-five years of looking hard at the back of my eyes, I'm always having to tell myself to use a little care."

"He was at the wreck," Ted blurted out. "He even asked me where

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Scanlon was and I told him before I passed out. But one of the rescue workers found Frenchy shot. Tubby said he was trying to find the dame. Do you think I'm dumb, Captain?"

"Far from it," said Maclain.

"I knew damn well what you were driving at in the car. Now that you've got those forty-fives, I suppose you'll tie up Tubby tight with Scanlon's murder."

"You seem far more certain that Tubby killed him than I do." The Captain idly pressed the space bar of the typewriter on the desk beside him.

"I don't think any such thing," Ted protested hotly. "Tubby never hurt anybody but himself. Frenchy had never married. He took his woman where he found them and sometimes where he didn't find them. My opinion isn't worth much, Captain, but I'll put my money on the vanishing dame." Ted ground out his cigarette viciously in an ashtray by the chair.

"Personal or hearsay?" the Captain inquired.

"What do you mean?"

"The anger in your voice and the way you snuffed out your cigarette at the risk of breaking the ashtray hinted to me that you might have had some experience with Major General Scanlon and his pass-making hands that hit you pretty close to home."

"Close to home is right," Ted said. "I met a girl at West Point. She lived right across the river. Her name was Joan. She was very beautiful. Scanlon met her there, too, about a year after I did. That's about all. He went to see her two or three times while I wasn't there. Joan and I had a couple of hot quarrels about him. You see, Captain, Frenchy had taken a *great* liking to me and had a *great* interest in my marvelous brain and my *great* athletic prowess. He was going to push me right along, and it was necessary for him to talk to Joan to find out what our plans were for the future since she intended to marry me."

Ted paused and went on, "The last time I saw her was in the cocktail bar of the New Yorker Hotel. I didn't want her to go to the train because Frenchy was there. It had taken almost four years, Captain, to get it through my iron skull that Frenchy was promoting the girl I was in love with, and doing it in his own delightful fashion by promoting me."

The Captain clicked the space bar six times slowly. In the bedroom Tubby's breathing had changed. He turned over once with a creak of springs. He might be waking.

The air had grown very oppressive. The Captain could feel the pressure against him and the sense of foreboding that always depressed him with the coming of a storm.

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"The girl," he said, "was Joan Hardesty."

"So Tubby told you."

"Nobody told me," the Captain said. "As a matter of fact, I'm quite surprised. Yet I shouldn't be. Murder is like a ring in your nose, Ted. Everybody involved in it, including the corpse and the murderer, is bound to be tied up together to make a perfect circle. But the vital part that keeps the ring from falling into your lap is the part that people can't see. I knew Huck for years before he died, and Joan and Anne and their stepmother, Mary. I even date back far enough to have known their mother, Agnes, the first Mrs. Hardesty. I don't know Jim Hyland."

"I do," Ted said. "You can add a piece to the ring in your nose—that Frenchy got Jim the job with Huck. He drove for Frenchy in Sicily. He's engaged to Anne and they'll be married this summer or later this year."

"He was here last night," the Captain said.

"I know it. Tubby told me he had an appointment to meet him." Ted got up and went to the phone and ordered ice. "Just because Tubby's out like a light there's no reason why we should be dying," he said as he took his chair. "And just because Jim Hyland happened to be in town last night I hope nobody gets the idea that he's the one who pinched my gun from Tubby's room here and shot me."

"Another idea that seems to be one of your own," the Captain said dryly. "He drove down here with Mrs. Hardesty and Joan. They left their car, as they always do, in a garage on Fifty-seventh Street near the West Side Highway and took a cab from there downtown. Hyland had dinner with them and left them at the theater. He went to a newsreel and met Tubby downstairs here at half-past ten. Five minutes or so before you came in, he left Tubby in the bar. He was in a cab at Third and MacDougal when the shooting started. Any more ideas?"

"Yes," Ted said. "Somebody can save a life by luring Tubby up to Huck's and keeping him there for a month at least, where he can't stick his nose in a bar."

The boy came up with a pitcher of ice and mixed a couple of highballs under Ted's direction, using whiskey from Tubby's portable bar.

"I had the same idea," the Captain said, when the drinks were served and the boy had gone. "As a matter of fact, I was going to suggest that you go up to Huck's for two or three weeks as my guest. I was only waiting for your approval to phone my chauffeur to come down here and see if the three of us can manage to get Tubby together. If we can, I want to drive us all up tonight in my car."

"Why me?" Ted asked after a moment. "Do you think, like Tubby, I need to have my nose kept out of a bar?"

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"You can take it any way you like," the Captain said. "The only interest I have in this and the only reason I'm in it is because you're blind. Tubby wants to go to Huck's and intends to go there, but he wouldn't be able to go if somebody's aim hadn't been bad last night. So much for Tubby. Now as to you —

"If you think you're playing with someone for marbles, you're wrong. You were knocked down last night, but it might be a forty-five that hits you the next time and not a marble. So a few weeks of rest and good food and exercise aren't going to hurt you, even if you have to cut down on cigarettes and keep out of a bar. . . .

"As to me — well, let's just say that Hardesty's seems to be here to stay — in the shot at Tubby, and Scanlon's murder. The connection has aroused my curiosity, so I'm going up there and find out where all three of us are."

"I'm not," Ted said.

The Captain sighed and took a drink, then asked him, "Joan?"

"Yes — Joan. How the hell do you think she'll feel if I come crawling up there blinded? I haven't even told her. I haven't even answered her letters since I was hit in Korea."

"You're perfectly right," the Captain said. "Blindness makes you brave and very noble. I could really take it. I spent twenty-nine years staying in love with my dogs until I found a woman who hit me over the head with a marriage license and informed me I was a selfish stinker. Sit back on your tail and be noble, Ted. Joan Hardesty will be very happy when she reads in the paper that you've been pushed in front of a subway car."

"I'll go," Ted said, "but dammit, Maclain, I'm telling you if you weren't blind I'd sock you." He took a noisy swallow and added, "That is, if I could see just where you are."

"You can locate me at the telephone," said Duncan Maclain. "I'm phoning Cappo to hurry down with the car."

The storm struck full when Cappo swung around Hawthorne Circle and took the Taconic Parkway.

The Captain couldn't see the lightning. But the thunder was real and cruel, smashing up against his eardrums like bombs in a war that swept your sight and your thinking away.

And the rain was real, almost hail, with the speed which it hit — bullets battering about you. Was everything in life to be bullets? Was every force in nature and every decent feeling of love and loyalty meant, by God, for nothing but to maim and kill? The raindrops were big and wet and cold and had no color. Blood drops were big and wet and *warm* and had no color.

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He reached out his finger and touched the buttons beside him and the electric windows slid up silently, shutting him in with the blinded man and the drunken man, whose head lolled soddenly against his shoulder — closing him in from the outside world and the outside storm in the Cadillac limousine.

"I want a drink," Tubby muttered. "Goddam their souls! I want a drink."

Ted said, "You'd better give him one. I brought a bottle."

"Give it to him," the Captain said. "Let him knock himself out. I talked to Hyland on the phone. Dr. Buchanan will be waiting for us when we get in."

Tubby muttered and the bottle gurgled. "Keep away from them, old boy. You've had enough. The perfect leech. God's gift to drunkards. It's raining like hell. Where am I?"

"On your way to Huck's," the Captain said. He settled down in the corner.

"Good old Huck!" The bottle gurgled.

The rain beat hard on the Cadillac windows. The tires sloshed and slubbered and sounded like tearing skin — or they must have to Tubby, the Captain thought.

"Good old Huck!" Tubby was saying. "He keeps you from getting a skinful, but he's dead and gone, killed himself with cigarettes. No wine, no women, no tobacco, but I've got myself a skinful. Good old liquor! I've got you under my skin."

The Captain said very gently, "Lay off it, Tubby, for a little while. You've had plenty." He took the bottle and put it down on the floor of the car beside him.

It was sixty miles to Philipstown and he judged they'd covered half the distance. There was no better driver than Cappo, but the storm had slowed him down.

"Good old Huck!" Tubby babbled. "No smokes. No wine. No women. I got him under my skin."

"You wanted to come up, didn't you?" the Captain asked.

"Clever. Very, very clever! Trying to trap me. Everybody is trying to trap me. Very clever!"

"Nobody's trying to trap you, Tubby," said Duncan Maclain.

"Found out I got the telegram and tried to shoot me. Wrote to the old home town. Beautiful Laura! Beautiful movie actress! Beautiful Dale! got the telegram here." Paper rustled. "That's a joke. Neither of you can see it."

"We could hear it if you read it," the Captain suggested.

"See, trying to trap me. I'll put it back in my pocket. Goin' to Huck's

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and tomorrow we're finished. Tomorrow!"

"What happens tomorrow?" the Captain asked.

"You diet tomorrow. I diet tomorrow. Darling Laura Dale, the movie actress. She diets tomorrow — without the *t*. That's a hot one!" He gave a drunken chuckle. "Without the *t*. Leave it to Papa, Laura. It won't be long!"

His head fell against the Captain's shoulder.

The rain beat on the windows. The Cadillac sped on.

At ten-past ten, it pulled in through the great stone gates of the late Huck Hardesty's Health Farm.

CHAPTER TEN

THE GROWTH of Huck Hardesty's Health Farm from one big old farmhouse purchased in 1910 to the rambling edifice with fifty-five guest rooms, game room, TV room, library, swimming pool and tennis courts, set in the middle of 450 acres on the edge of the Hudson, was living proof of what an honest courageous man could do once he set himself to follow out a sound idea.

Huck in his younger days was a wrestler, and those were the days of Gotch and Hackensmith when a wrestler had to know more about squeezing than squealing. Later in New York City Huck opened a gym. It was in that gym, where he trained many candidates for the fire department and the police force, that his fame as an expert conditioner of men first became known. It was there that the idea of Huck's health farm was born.

Prominent businessmen began to drop in after office hours for fifteen fast minutes of medicine ball, a shower, steam bath, and rub-down. Word got around that three afternoons a week might not keep you from growing old but it would keep the Floradora Sextet from secretly comparing you to Diamond Jim Brady. A select and highly confidential clientele began to drop in in the morning — gentlemen seeking a quick recovery from a little too much indulgence in lobster and Mumm's Extra Dry the night before.

Magnate or mug, Huck treated them all the same. They did what he told them to for the hour in his gym or they didn't come back again. But most of his customers always came back and brought more. They found that an hour spent at Huck's left them with a rosy glow. Bankers could turn down tempting loans that weren't too good. Lawyers could jack up a

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client's fee. Ruddy-faced wolves of Wall Street could turn their woozy opponents into a bull-and-bear stew.

It struck Huck that if he could help these obese gentlemen in their business efforts with a single hour a day he should be able to turn them into titans provided he could just get hold of them for two weeks or a month at a time. So the health farm was born and it prospered from the very first hour.

It was a place where Coronas and champagne were strictly taboo, a place where Huck Hardesty was boss. Winter or summer you were up at six-twenty and after gym drill and massage, hikes, baths, sun baths, salt rubs, horseback riding, tennis, squash and handball, you were ready to get to bed at nine with the knowledge that you'd had a busy day.

Since Huck collected strictly in advance, if you didn't like the discipline he'd tell you in no uncertain terms that it was always your privilege to pack your bags and go away. Very few left before the end of their time.

If they stuck it four days, the world began to look brighter. The food tasted better and sleep became a wonderful thing.

When word got around that Huck had tossed out a world-famous movie star for drinking on the premises, Hardesty's was here to stay.

But Huck hadn't done it all alone. His first wife had died in 1938, leaving him with two young daughters, eight and eleven, Joan and Anne. They had pitched in and helped as their mother had helped. Beautiful, black-haired colleens as alike as twins.

Both were pleased when Huck married again for they both adored their stepmother, Mary.

Then there was Swanny Swanson, the quiet muscular head trainer who was the backbone of Huck's regime and who had been with Huck since Swanny was a boy.

Also a lot of credit went to Dr. L. Arthur Buchanan who had attended every guest at Huck's for forty years. The doctor was wealthy in his own right through the addition of a very lucrative practice and it was a standing quip around the health farm that someday Dr. Buchanan would be sure to send a bill.

Dr. Buchanan and his wife, Alice, a nurse who was twenty-five years his junior, lived in another farmhouse on Huck's property about a quarter of a mile from the main building. They had moved in there and the doctor had opened an office when Huck, due to the labor shortage, rationing, and high cost of food, had given up his prize stock, horses, farming and orchards during World War II.

On the night that Duncan Maclain and Ted arrived at the health farm with their drunken companion, Joan and Anne had just gone to bed when

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Alice Buchanan rapped lightly at the door and without waiting for an answer came in. She was a calm, exquisitely featured woman with large expressive gray eyes.

"Now what's the trouble?" Anne Hardesty took a look at Alice's face and sat up in bed.

Alice lifted up the hooded raincoat that hung over her arm. "I thought you girls might know where there's some paraldehyde. Swanny's out of stock and Mary says there's none in the closet off the kitchen of the apartment. I'm trying to save a drive through this rain down to the office, even though it isn't far."

"You're out of luck," Joan said without turning around. "Let Jim or Swanny go."

"I think they had better stay with Mr. Severn until he gets to sleep. He looks as if the D.T.'s aren't far off. He insisted on going upstairs by himself and getting undressed."

"Yes," said Joan. "They always do, so they can finish the bottle before Swanny gets it. Where did Jim put him?"

"In number seven," Alice said, "Huck's old room. It's quiet there and he won't disturb anyone else. I'll run along." She stopped at the door. "Jim put the two blind men in rooms down in the other wing — twenty-six and twenty-eight. It's a pity you had to run upstairs so quickly, Joan. They were asking for you."

"I was tired," Joan said.

"That's what I told them. I guess Captain Maclain's chauffeur can drive me down. He's staying with us at the farmhouse. One thing we have there is plenty of room." She went out into the hall.

Anne said, "How could you, Joan?"

"What?"

"Not speak to Ted. You know perfectly well what. You love him."

"Oh, Anne, Anne, of course I do! But he hadn't written, and I don't know. And then that shooting last night at Mr. Severn — and the policemen coming here today to check on Jim. And then they came in and I wanted to throw my arms around him. It isn't his being blind, Anne."

Joan got in bed. Anne switched off the light, reached out through the darkness and for an instant clung to her sister's hand.

"I know, baby," Anne said very softly. "Go to sleep. It's the storm."

The thunder and lightning moved up the river. The wind grew stronger, settling down to feel its strength once the boom and crash of the competing thunder was gone. It lashed at the water, tore through trees, skidded over roof-tops, and whipped a froth on the surface of streaming black deserted

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highways. It charged against the side of the hill and made the assault at fifty miles an hour. The top was won by its unopposed fury.

Oaks and pines and firs and cedars waved their boughs in helpless surrender, appealing to lowering scudding clouds that could not help them. Huck's farm, standing unprotected, was taken at last in a high-strung shriek of wailing victorious sound.

Guests on the windward side of the building woke in quick uneasiness. Here and there a light came up, and in violation of Huck Hardesty's rule — fresh air all night and all the time — windows were hurriedly put down.

In back of the house, an ash can fell and bounded and skittered, its lid flying off to bang against a coping with a hollow clang.

Anne breathed uneasily, then turned to sink into a deeper sleep. Joan fixed her wide-awake eyes on the hands of a luminous clock.

It was half-past four.

In two short hours Swanny would have all the guests awake with his, "Pewtiful morning, gentlemen! Everyone up and down to the gym!" even though the house were tumbling down.

Joan got out of bed, put on her bathrobe and slippers, took her flashlight and went out into the darkened hall.

She had heard that tapping for two full years, ever since the night that Huck had died in the storm. Tonight it was stronger, much more real.

She knew what it was, the sound of a human pendulum swinging, the slippers that tapped against the desk. She knew that it came from number seven, Huck's old room, the quiet one, the one at the end of the pitch-dark hall that led off to her left, the hall where sometimes, while Huck was alive, the twelve big rooms, with their fourteen-foot ceilings, all used to be filled with men who were trying to find escape from living, the rooms that were mostly vacant now in the hall called Alcohol Alley.

So she turned away from where she knew the sound was coming. To find the entrance to insanity. So she had to find it some place else, and prove to herself that her terror was wrong.

The light led the way down the stairs and the sound was fainter; the front door and the big broad porch, and the wind and rain screaming and snatching at her — and the sound was gone. Inside again, the office, and the TV room, the library with its great leather chairs, the long dark game room where pool balls gave her a colorful grin in disarray on the tables.

Into the dining room, through the pantry, into the locker room, into the gym and hurry, hurry its polished length to the volley-ball court.

Only the wind.

There was no sound in the first place.

Back through the gym, with a glance outside at the swimming pool.

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Wind, rain, imagination, insanity! The sound of the tapping heels had gone.

Back through the pantry and dining room and up the stairs.

And the sound growing closer!

You have to look, Joan, or your mind is gone. You looked the night your father died. Surely you can look again when you know there's only a drunk there.

See, you're really quite sane! He's hanging there dead, hanged by the neck. There's the desk, with the chair he jumped off of standing on top, and his slippers knocking against the edge as he blows back and forth in the wind from the open window. . . .

A full two hundred and thirty pounds of weight for the wagon!

Swing and tap. Swing and tap. That was the way that Huck had gone and the way she'd found him.

Suicide!

Only now, it was Tubby Severn.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

JIM HYLAND'S HEIGHT — he was six-foot-three — and a tendency he had to walk on the balls of his feet with quiet space-eating steps, bending slightly forward, gave him the appearance of a lanky stalking hunter.

An aquiline face with a high forehead, piercing black eyes back of horn-rimmed glasses perched on a prominent nose, was saved from looking completely vulture-like by Jim's wide humorous mouth, fine white teeth and ready, almost apologetic grin.

He gave a first appearance of ruthless ferocity that was utterly false. Employees at Huck's soon found out that Jim, while demanding strict adherence to rules, was a sympathetic listener to a hard luck tale, and an easy touch.

The storm had moved by and the first hints of a beautiful day were showing through the windows when Jim went into No. 7 to join Dr. Buchanan and Duncan Maclain.

Ten minutes of watching the doctor's businesslike examination of what had been a living man a few hours before started Jim's sensitive insides crawling until he was forced to sink down weakly into a chair.

The doctor finished and went into the lavatory to wash his hands.

"Broken neck," he said through the open door. "See what you think,

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Captain Maclain. He must have put that chair on the desk, climbed up and jumped from the chair." He came out wiping his surgeon's hands on a paper towel, an elderly, spare, efficient man with an impassive face and bluish-gray hair.

Maclain let his artful fingers start at the dangling slippers and move with the lightness of floating soot upward over pajama legs to the half-buttoned jacket.

Early-morning noises of rattling pans and a shaken-down fire drifted in through the window from the kitchen below.

The Captain moved his fingers to brush the desk top and inspect the legs of the chair.

"There's a blotter on top of the desk," he said, "and a damp place on the blotter. I felt a small puddle of water near the window a few minutes ago. The soles of his slippers are still slightly damp. Is that a footprint on the blotter, Mr. Hyland?"

Jim stared up at the distorted face, the rope wound around the steampipe, and the chubby head bent sideways so grotesquely. His mouth began to fill with fluid.

"You'd better look, Dr. Buchanan," he forced himself to say. "I've seen dead men before, but this one seems to be deader than any I ever looked at. I'm afraid if I get any closer—"

"I know what you mean, Jim," the Captain said kindly. "There really are, believe it or not, a few compensations in not being able to see."

Dr. Buchanan went up beside him. "It's a footprint all right; where he stepped on the desk to get up on the chair."

"Or where the blotter was pressed against his slipper," the Captain remarked.

"Against his slipper?" A hint of a challenge had crept into Dr. Buchanan's question.

"After he was hauled up there," said Duncan Maclain.

"God in heaven!" Jim blurted out with a noisy swallow. "Do we have to mess around like this? The man weighed two hundred and some pounds, and that steampipe's ten feet from the floor. Let's get Swanny and our two strong-arm trainers up here and cut him down. He hanged himself, just as Huck did two years ago."

"Wait a minute, Jim." Dr. Buchanan silenced Hyland by the authority of his tone. "This body can't be moved until the coroner and a man from the sheriff's office get here anyway." He turned to Maclain. "What makes you think this man was hauled up there, Captain? That's murder, and as Jim says, Huck died the same way."

"Then maybe Huck was murdered, too," said Duncan Maclain. "At

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any rate, doctor, my advice is that you, for your own protection, phone the Bureau of Criminal Investigation of the State Police and have some officer sent here who has authority enough to order a physical autopsy, a chemical analysis, and a spectrographic analysis for barbiturates — as should have been done with Huck."

Jim got to his feet suddenly and said angrily, "Start anything like that and you finish Huck Hardesty's, or what's left of it after Judge Rafferty dying of heart failure in the steam room two years ago, and Huck hanging himself the same night. Why, you might as well say that Rafferty was murdered!"

"He was," Dr. Buchanan said shortly.

"But you signed his death certificate." Jim's dark face slowly paled.

"Heart failure," the doctor said. "I'd been treating him for it, and his own doctor at home had for a number of years, but he didn't die of that. He died of cyanide poisoning from lemon juice he drank in the locker room. The lemon killed a hog that ate it in the garbage, but that was after the Judge had been cremated. It was a little late to prove anything then, Jim. It's a little late now to prove that Huck wasn't a suicide."

"Unless we prove that Severn didn't hang himself in spite of all these elaborate preparations," said Maclain. "A proper autopsy should do it."

The doctor stared up at the dangling body and asked, "How?"

"Paraldehyde," said Duncan Maclain. "It shows up like alcohol, as you know — plus one, two, three, or four in the brain. How much did you give him last night?"

"Nearly an ounce," Dr. Buchanan said. His face seemed to sag, and for an instant he looked quite gray.

"Do you think a man with that much paraldehyde in him could do that?" the Captain pointed.

"He couldn't have even turned over in bed for at least six or eight hours," the doctor stated positively. "I'm sorry if it causes trouble, Jim, but I'm phoning for the State Police right now."

CHAPTER TWELVE

BY EIGHT O'CLOCK in the morning, room No. 7, Huck Hardesty's Health Farm, and the remains of the late Myron Severn were more or less officially turned over to the efficient, if complex, workings of the New York state and county law.

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The coroner, a nervous little man who had spent his life walking a political fence, had arrived with an examining medical man and a representative of the sheriff's office.

It looked like a nice clean suicide that wasn't going to cost the county too much time or money. The medical man in attendance had a sharp brush with Dr. Buchanan when he found the doctor insistent that a sufficient portion of Tubby's remains be rushed to Poughkeepsie for further analysis.

He got really angry when Lieut. Tom Rivers of the Bureau of Criminal Investigation, a quiet, self-assured state officer in unobtrusive sport clothes, arrived a few minutes later and took over. The Lieutenant backed up Dr. Buchanan to the limit. Inspector John Ferguson, the Lieutenant's superior, would want to have a report from the hospital as soon as possible — preferably that same evening.

The county officials departed en masse, disliking Lieutenant Rivers and everything about him, including the glint of humor in his watchful eyes and his half-mocking smile.

Three miles south of Huck Hardesty's Health Farm on the main highway, passing motorists occasionally pause for a moment, caught by the gracious architecture of the Catholic Shelter of St. Francis of Assisi.

Open to any man regardless of race, creed or color for as long as he wants to stay and do his share of work around the spacious grounds and buildings, it had proved a godsend to Huck's by furnishing through the years an inexhaustible supply of labor.

Jim Hyland, and Bill Laverty, the farm's superintendent, still depended greatly on the Shelter for transient employees. Jim and Bill brushed aside Lieutenant Rivers' suggestion that Severn's death might have some bearing on the fact that in the morning three employees hired from the Shelter a week before had quietly packed their sparse belongings and gone.

"Yesterday was pay day," Jim explained. "Most of them can stand our no smoking and no drinking rules just so long."

"So the guests pay us one-fifty a week in advance to cut out liquor and tobacco — and the employees leave," Laverty put in with a grin. "We're lucky we collect in advance or the guests might be gone."

Bill Laverty had been talking to Rivers and Duncan Maclain in front of the porte-cochere. He started to get in his battered pickup.

Rivers asked, "Did you know these guys, Bill? Any references, I mean?"

"References?" Laverty spat disgustedy. "For the love of Mike, Lieutenant, we pay seventeen bucks a week, a bed in the dorm, and chow."

"How do you know what you're getting?"

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"At that price? You don't. These fellows are down on their luck. I tell Father Garvey what I need and how many. He sorts out what he thinks is the pick. I look 'em over and try to pick the ones that don't look like they've been boiled ten years in alcohol. I say, 'Can you dig a hole, chum?' He says, 'No, can you?' and I say, 'You're hired.' "

"You mean you don't even know their names?" The Lieutenant's police instincts were suffering badly.

"Sometimes *they* don't," Bill told him. "Say, I'm going up to the Shelter now to get three more. The grass is getting six feet high and the tennis courts need rolling. Why don't you and the Captain, here, come along?"

Rivers said, "We'll take the police car. What about it, Captain?"

"I'd like very much to meet Father Garvey." The Captain got in the car. "There's a blinded veteran up here with me, Ted Yates. I'd like to take him along."

Laverty said, "Miss Joan drove him over to the Point in her car. Swanny was beefing — and about you, too, Captain. You were both supposed to have a physical by Doc Buchanan today."

"I've already been examined by him," the Captain said, "and cross-examined, too."

They were out of the gates when the Captain spoke again. "Tell me something, will you, Bill? Huck hanged himself two years ago — and another man hanged himself last night. I've been wondering where the rope came from."

"Coil in the cellar." Bill lit himself a cigarette and flipped the match out the window. "Huck bought it about three years ago to haul an old boiler up the hill. I'm sorry I saved it now."

The police car turned left up a winding driveway and the Captain heard the crunch of gravel as it stopped before a building.

They went inside and through a door to the left. Maclain smelled cabbage faintly on the air.

Laverty said, "This is the office, Captain," and found him a chair. "I'll find Father Garvey."

"Where's your dog?" Lieutenant Rivers sat down beside him.

"She's having a day off with four hundred acres to run in," the Captain told him. "I left her in my chauffeur's care, but I think Maggie, the housekeeper, has taken her over."

"Maggie Dunne," Rivers said. "Quite a woman there. . . . What's about the rope?"

"Just one of the things that you were wondering. How did Tubby find the knife, or whatever he used to cut it? Assuming next that he wasn't drunk and wasn't doped, how the devil did he find the rope in the cellar

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when he didn't know it was there?"

Father Garvey came in with Laverty. The Captain heard the scrape of his sandals and the soft swish of his habit, and stood up.

Laverty introduced him.

Father Garvey shook hands with a powerful grip and said, "Please sit down and be comfortable, Captain. How are you, Rivers?"

The Captain heard the squeak of a swivel chair.

"A man named Myron Severn hanged himself at Huck's last night, Father," Rivers began. "Three men Bill employed from here about a week ago disappeared this morning. I was wondering if you could tell me anything about them."

Laverty gave their names to Father Garvey.

"I can only tell you they didn't return here," the Father said. "We have so many that come and go. We seldom know from where to where. We ask few questions, contenting ourselves if we can give them in passing a little rest for mind and body, a little spiritual counsel for a troubled soul."

Father Garvey paused, and continued, "If you think this is a suicide, Lieutenant Rivers, why your interest in these men? You have had no interest in the hundreds at Huck's that come and go."

"There may be some question," Rivers told him. "The returns from the autopsy should let us know."

"Yet you held none on Huck two years ago." Father Garvey's voice was sad. "I said Mass at his parish church. I had known him for years. Ask his own pastor, Father Devereux, if Huck Hardesty deliberately hanged himself. He will tell you as I will tell you — no."

"You speak with a lot of assurance, Father," said Duncan Maclain.

"The assurance of faith," Father Garvey said. "Suicide to Huck Hardesty was a mortal sin and he was anything but a weakling in his beliefs. He could not possibly have killed himself. He is buried in the sacred ground of a Catholic cemetery at Beacon — because Father Devereux, and I, and all associated with him are sure of that fact. Whatever the appearances, Huck did not kill himself. We know."

"It's a little late to prove it now, Father." Rivers stood up.

"Except, perhaps, through Myron Severn," the Captain said.

"Myron Severn was married," said Father Garvey. "At least I talked to a prisoner in Bedford Hills in 1936 who told me that she'd married him shortly after World War I. I'm afraid I've even forgotten her name. I felt that under the circumstances I should tell you, although it's possible, God rest his soul, he might not have wanted you to know."

"What did she look like, Father?" Rivers asked. "I know that's a long time back."

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Father Garvey was thoughtfully silent. "She was pretty, but losing her looks. I doubt very much if I'd know her today."

"You don't remember her eyes? Height? Hair?"

"I'm afraid I only remember the name of Myron Severn, and that only because of his partner, Jake Patman. They've been kind to the Church. I don't recall how long she was serving or what for. I was visiting the prison chaplain and was only there for a day or two."

Lieutenant Rivers closed his notebook with a snap.

"I wonder if they had any children," said Duncan Maclain.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Inspector John Ferguson, B.C.I., read the report on his desk and snorted. He looked at the daily report book. Tom Rivers was on the case, his best man. He read the pathologist's report again, and snorted again.

"Paraldehyde content of brain tissue — plus four."

He put in a call for Rivers at Huck's and while he was waiting the name of Myron Severn kept bothering him. By the time that Rivers was called from the dining room, the Inspector had it. Severn had been shot at in New York two nights before. Troop K had been asked by the New York police to talk to James Hyland, because Hyland had been with Severn just before the shooting.

Ferguson leafed over the report book as he hung on to the receiver. That was it, all right. They'd made a routine check at Hardesty's the previous day.

"Lieutenant Rivers speaking."

"Ferguson, Lieutenant. You said this fellow, Severn, hanged himself when you called in this morning."

"I said 'apparently,' sir."

"The report's in from the hospital, Lieutenant. Dammit all, the man was full of paraldehyde. You might as well say he apparently killed himself by punching himself to death on the jaw. Somebody strangled him and hauled him up there. It's been done before."

"Yes, sir. His neck was broken. I've looked at the rope under a microscope in the doctor's office. The fibers all indicate that he hanged himself."

"So the hell with what the fibers indicate," Ferguson said. "Have you notified the sheriff's office and the D. A.?"

"A deputy sheriff was here with the coroner —"

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"Did the coroner call you, or the deputy?"

"Neither, Inspector. There's a private investigator here —"

"For Christ's sake, Rivers! Who called him in?"

"He was here, sir. He drove Severn and another blind man up here last night in his car."

"Well, goddammit, it says nothing in this report about Severn being blind! How can a blind man who's drunk and full of paraldehyde find a goddam rope and —"

"If you'll wait just a minute, Inspector, I'll try to make this clear. Severn wasn't blind —"

"You just said he was. Why, dammit all —"

"I'm sorry, sir. I said this private op was blind. He has a license and a a dog, and he phoned us."

"What the hell do I care if his dog has a license?" It was getting late in the evening and Inspector Ferguson was hungry. Huck Hardesty's Health Farm was an institution that swung a lot of local weight, and now his right-hand officer had gotten a snootful on duty, or gone completely crazy. His voice took on a note of hearty camaraderie that those who knew him didn't like at all. "I'm sure you'll have all this under control in a very short time, Lieutenant. It's always struck me as humorous as hell when a simple suicide turns out to be a murder. I'm simply killing myself laughing over this blind private eye that drove the corpse up there in his car. Or did you say the dog drove the car?"

"He really is blind, Inspector," Lieutenant Rivers went on patiently. "His name is Captain Duncan Maclain. At his suggestion, I called Inspector Davis in New York this morning to check. The Inspector says he's a real help and that if we don't use him since he's up here we're a bunch of ninnies. Davis was surprised at Severn's suicide and thinks it's fishy. He was also surprised we hadn't heard of Maclain before."

"I'll be satisfied if I never hear of him again," Ferguson said. "Now, listen. Who's this other blind man? Goddammit, Rivers, I'm going crazy! Hold everyone there. I'll be up in an hour."

"The other one's Yates. He was blinded in Korea last June, I believe." Rivers went on undisturbed. "He was engaged to Joan Hardesty, met her at the Point, then didn't write after he was blinded. I think today they got together again."

There was an ominous silence on the phone.

Rivers finally asked, "Are you there, sir?"

"If you've finished with the social notes and the war news, Lieutenant," Ferguson said in a deadly tone, "I was on the point of telling you that I'll call the D.A. in Carmel, and bring a photographer, and Snyder for finger-

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prints, with me. You haven't anything recent, have you, on the birth rate of blind babies born in Philipstown?"

"No, sir," Rivers said, "but Captain Maclain wants us to check through the parole board on a prisoner who was in Bedford in 'thirty-six. We don't have her name, but she was married to Myron Severn. He also wants information on a girl named Laura Dale."

"Dammit to hell," the Inspector roared, "even I know who Laura Dale is. She's a movie star, or was. She died."

"Thank you, sir," said Lieutenant Rivers.

The Inspector slammed down the telephone and told Sergeant Lucey to get the photo and fingerprint men and come along with the car himself.

"Murder?" Sergeant Lucey found nerve to ask.

"I'll say it's murder!" the Inspector snapped. "Can't you fellows take a killing that isn't pure routine?"

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MRS. HARDESTY SMOOTHED the folds of her plum-colored dress tightly down over her shapely knees and leaned her graying head wearily against the back of her chair.

So many people were dependent on Huck's.

She looked at Anne and Jim Hyland seated on a sofa, and at Joan and Ted Yates in chairs close together.

It was hard to think that Ted was blind.

She turned her eyes to Duncan Maclain, seated on a footstool with his dog at his feet.

It was also hard to think of him as blind. She hoped that Ted would do as well, have the same courage, and be as happy when he reached the Captain's age.

Mrs. Hardesty spoke in a voice that was very strained.

"I've known you a long time, Captain."

"More than fifteen years," said Maclain.

"In the past two minutes I've taken a journey through that time and seen the rise of Huck Hardesty's. We have a great many loyal guests who keep returning year after year, as you have, but they're getting older and their sons . . ."

"I can tell you about their sons," Jim said. "Their sons are ready to run a mile from anything that smacks of regimentation. Their sons have had a

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bellyful of army and a double bellyful of war. What the hell's the use of keeping fit so somebody can blind or kill you? Let's go train at the nearest cocktail bar!"

"Jim's perfectly right," Mrs. Hardesty said sadly. "But up until today we've been managing to get by. Now, with Inspector Ferguson questioning all the guests and the police taking pictures —"

"Just who are the guests?" the Captain inquired.

"There's only one who hasn't been here before," Jim Hyland told him. "Barry Whitfield, the radio singer. He just got in yesterday. Ross Demarest is a retired broker. Matt Snowden's a gambler. Sam Weisman's a lawyer. Dan Reilly's a C.P.A. Bert Parker's in restaurant supplies. Jake Steiner publishes *Corsets and Underwear*. They've all been here a dozen times before. Then there was Ted, you and Severn."

"Were any of them here on the day when Huck and the Judge died?" the Captain asked.

The big sitting room of Mary Hardesty's suite was very silent as a minute ticked by.

Sam Weisman's unmistakable voice came up clearly from the terrace by the swimming pool one story below. "How the hell are they going to keep it quiet? Severn — great God, he's known all over New York on account of the Merry-Go-Round! I'll make a bet that it's been tipped to the press by the state police already. How the hell could anyone hang a tub of lard like Severn? If I was Mary's attorney I'd advise her to sue."

"Sue who?" asked the voice of Barry Whitfield, the singer. "Personally, any publicity I happen to get can do nothing but help me. Mark Twain used to say . . ."

Jim Hyland left his seat and noisily slammed down the window overlooking the terrace. "You started it, Captain," he said to Maclain. "You're not satisfied with having somebody murder Severn — you have to drag in Judge Rafferty and Huck. Sam Weisman was here the day they died, and Dan Reilly. I suppose you'll have them arrested now, and me and Mary and the girls, and Doctor and Alice Buchanan, and Swanny, and Mrs. Dunne. We all were here two years ago."

"I'm sorry, Jim," the Captain said. "If I've stuck my neck out it certainly was with no intention of hurting any of you. An attempt was made on Tubby's life, as you all know. He spoke to Ted and me in the car about a telegram he had with him. That telegram was taken from his room last night."

"How do you know?" Jim demanded.

"I'm merely guessing," the Captain told him, "because the state police didn't find it."

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"You never saw it, did you?" Jim said with an edge. "And you heard just now what Weisman said. It's just as impossible that Severn was hanged by someone as that he hanged himself. I'll believe that until you tell me how it could be done. That goes for Huck and Judge Rafferty, too. What have you got to say about that, Captain Maclain?"

"Nothing at all," the Captain said shortly.

"I'll say it then, Jim," Mrs. Hardesty said. "I retained the Captain today to clear this up. Rafferty died of cyanide poisoning — from half a lemon planted in the locker room. Dr. Buchanan didn't find it out until several days later when a pig died from eating it in the garbage. By that time Rafferty had been cremated."

"My God, Mary," Anne Hardesty said. "You've never mentioned this before!"

"Huck owed him fifty thousand dollars," Mary told her. "The Judge was pressing him badly. They came from a hike and went into the locker room together. There was nobody there. The Judge drank lemon juice from the only half a lemon that was on the tray — but Huck didn't."

"And you didn't report it?" Hyland asked.

"She thought Huck killed him," said Duncan Maclain. "Then she thought Huck committed suicide, and that that was plenty for him to pay. Dr. Buchanan agreed. Mary told me about it a year ago."

"And what did you think?" Jim demanded.

"The same as Mary," the Captain said. "Both of us changed our minds today."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"THE LEMON," Swanny declared in his best gym-class lecturing tone, "is the most healthful of fruids. Taken vith hot vater in the morning it cleans all of the intestines very clean and purifies the kidneys. It has a most beneficial effect on reducing of the veight by opening the pores and reliefing the body of all unnecessary secretions."

It was ten o'clock in the morning and two squads of guests were out on hikes in charge of Pete Angelo and Kit Donatelli. Sunlight was streaming in the high-set windows.

It was very hot in the gym.

Inspector Ferguson and Lieutenant Rivers, sitting side by side on the three steps that led from the gym to the locker room, were watching Ted Yates and Duncan Maclain. Clad in long gym pants, blue-topped tennis

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shoes and sweat shirts, the Captain and Ted were working up sweats. The Captain was tossing a heavy medicine ball with Swanny. Ted was hoisting and lowering a set of wall weights.

Swanny, a remarkable blond figure for any man near fifty, hitched up his blue-striped white shorts around his flat stomach, stuck out his barrel chest another inch to bring the blue-lettered *Huck's* more prominently into view, and continued his dissertation on lemons.

"Mos' people think the lemon is acid." Swanny turned his freckled face and mild blue eyes toward Ferguson and mentally measured the Inspector's stomach. Ferguson hastily sucked it in. "That is not true. The lemon, like all citrus fruids, as Huck alvays told me, is alkaline. The grapefruid, and the lemon set up in the stomach —"

"I like them," the Inspector said, "with gin." He turned in time to see the Captain catch the ball and grin. "How the hell do you know when to catch that thing?"

"Rhythm," Maclain explained. "You stay in one place and after you've had your guts knocked out a couple of times you begin to get the swing."

"I've had plenty," Ted said and let the wall weights drop with a clang. "They're trying to melt me down, Inspector. Don't you think I already look too thin?"

"Yust enough, Mr. Yates," Swanny put in. "In a month you be a hundred and ninety-fife pounds of muscle, but not thin. I vant the Captain should try the bar bells now, please. Here."

Swanny walked down to the far end of the gym where two giant dumbbells sat on a rack. Maclain and Ted and the curious officers followed.

The Captain ran his fingers over the smaller bar bell. He judged it accurately as five feet long, with seven circular iron plates that slipped on each end and locked on the bar with a collar. The plates were graded down in size from the largest one in the center of each group of seven.

The second bar bell was six feet long, and the plates at each end were larger in diameter and thickness.

The Captain tentatively tried to lift it and Swanny chuckled. "Please, no, not yet, Captain Maclain. That six-foot bar veighs tventy-fife pounds itself. There are ninety pounds of plates on each end. That is two hundred and fife pounds in all."

"And what about this baby, Swanny?" Ted was fingering the smaller one.

"Fife feet, the bar," Swanny told him. "It veighs tventy pounds itself with yust the collars that lock the plates on. There are seventy pounds of plates on each end. The biggest plate is tventy, the next four — two on each side of the tventy — are ten, and the two small ones are fife each.

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The bar complete with all plates is vun hundred and sixty."

"You expect them to play around with those things?" Rivers asked pressing closer.

"Ve start very easy." Swanny turned a clamp, slipped off one at a time. He repeated the operation until both steel bars were bare. "Now," he said, "ve put vun single ten-pound plate on each end of the tventy-pound bar and lock them on. Forty pounds altogedder — so."

Ted said, "Let's see what I can do, Swanny. Fix the other and let me try."

Swanny lifted the bar from its rack and set it lightly on the floor. "Now I have some two and a half pound little plates in this pile here by the vall. So ve put a fife-pound plate and vun of these on each end of the big bar and lock it — so! The big bar is also now forty pounds. Not so?"

"Yeah," the Inspector muttered, "I guess so."

"Now, Mr. Yates and Captain Maclain, ve first vill try the military press, then the two-hand snatch, then the clean-and-yerk."

"Yeah, keep it clean." The Inspector reached for a cigarette, caught Swanny's disapproving look, said, "By God, I'll smoke here if I want to or any place!" and put the cigarette back in his pocket.

"For the military press, you lift the bar up shoulder high, standing vith the knees, locked —"

"How the hell do you lock your knees, Swanny? " Ted wanted to know.

"Vell —" Swanny was used to visual demonstration, and when faced with a problem of verbal explanation, his accent, a cross of Swedish, German, and a couple of minor countries, grew thicker. "The knees is bent, no? The knees is apart und spread. So the knees is locked." He slightly bent his powerful legs. "So!"

"He looks like he's going to spring at you boys," Ferguson explained. "Not so, Swanny?"

"Please," said Swanny. "Yes, it is not so because the knees is now locked."

The Captain had the bar bell shoulder high. He sighed and said, "Let's go, Swanny. The military press. This thing's getting heavy already."

"The back is kept straight. Now push up until the elbows lock —"

"Oh, my God!" Ted said.

Swanny counted, "Vun! Two! Three! Now slowly down to the floor."

Both bar bells came down lightly as feathers.

"Now the two-hand snatch, please, gentlemen. Bar on floor. Vun knee bent. Grab and lift above the head until elbows lock. No stopping. Vun! Two! Three!"

The bars went up and down again.

"Now the clean-and-yerk. Vun knee bent. Grab and lift to the vaist.

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Stop and get into best position. Yerk until elbows lock above the head. The lifters has lifted more vith the clean-and-yerk than vith the other two."

"How much more?" Ted inquired. He was breathing easily, and the Captain, too.

"There is classes, like in boxing," Swanny explained. "Bantam — feather — light and middleveight. Light and middle heavyveight, and heavyveight. John Davis, vorld heavyveight champion, lifted three-forty in the military press, three-tventy in the two-hand snatch, and in the clean-and-yerk —" Swanny's voice became worshipful — "four hundred and two! The three is added togedder for the championship total lift — vun thousand and sixty-two!"

"What's the best you have done?" the Captain asked.

"I'm a middle heavyveight," Swanny told him, "but I'm not so gude. Kit and Pete, and even Muscles, the locker boy, is better. Three hundred vith the clean-and-yerk is the best I can do."

The Captain said, "I'm for the showers. Come on, Ted." He stopped halfway down the length of the gym with the others following. "Weren't you a wrestler, Swanny?"

"Huck taught me some. Huck was gude. I vas not so gude."

"Aren't there some holds that will break a man's neck?"

"The head hold and tvist, and the half-Nelson might do. Both is dangerous if man is not big as you."

They went on into the locker room.

"Your Hardesty cocktail, gentlemen." Swanny picked two half-lemons from a bowl by the washbasins, squeezed them into heavy mugs and added hot water from a pyrex pitcher on an electric heater. "The lemon yuice is —"

"Poison to some people," said Duncan Maclain, "but I'll drink it just to please you." He took the mug from Swanny and started sipping. "Tell me something, Swanny. Do you remember the day Judge Rafferty died?"

"Quite vell. Two years ago. Huck was very mad at me because of the lemons. The lemons vas here ven ve left for the hike. Huck and the Yudge took the shortest hike — the Yudge vas not vell. Ven Huck and the Yudge got back all but half vun lemon is gone. Huck gave it to the Yudge. He alvays insisted on half a lemon in the vater. So Huck had none."

The Captain finished his lemon juice, went to the locker where his clothes were hung, and started to strip for the shower.

Naked, he walked to the scales and stepped on. The Inspector's black eyes admiringly appraised the Captain's hard flat muscles and the set of his powerful shoulders.

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"Gude," said Swanny. "Vun hundred and ninety-five and no fat. Huck veighed two-o-two."

"And Tubby Severn, two-thirty." The Captain stepped down from the scales. "I've learned a lot this morning, Swanny. Apparently there are people in the world who can grab hold of a two-hundred-pound man — dead or alive — and lift him up like a baby."

The Inspector said, "When you get yourself dressed, Maclain, maybe you'll come upstairs to the execution chamber. Goddammit, if I have to work with a case that's out of a mystery book I might as well have a blind man helping me, and he might as well have muscles and brains like you!"

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE Inspector and Lieutenant Rivers watched the Captain in silence as he circled the room for the third time, touching Tubby's comb and brush and shaving kit laid out on the bureau, exploring the contents of every drawer, lifting out the remaining articles, shirts, sox and handkerchiefs and replacing them swiftly in accurate position in the open suitcase at the foot of the double bed on the floor.

He vanished from sight into the ample closet where a linen suit of Tubby's was hanging, together with two sport jackets and slacks, hung up neatly by Swanny the night before. The Inspector had a glimpse of the Captain as he patted and searched every pocket once more.

The Captain came out, his expressive face an unreadable mask.

"You found no trace of the telegram I told you about, Lieutenant?"

"Absolutely none." A rubber band snapped as Rivers unfastened his notebook. "According to you and Ted Yates, Severn's words were, 'Found out I got the telegram and tried to shoot me. Wrote to the old home town. Beautiful movie actress — got the telegram here. . . . That's a joke. Neither of you can see it.' Then he went on into that diet routine, 'You diet — I diet — She diets tomorrow without the *t*.'"

The Inspector lit a cigarette. "Swanny and Dr. Buchanan, Alice Buchanan, and Jim Hyland were all in this room. None of them saw a telegram. Mrs. Buchanan brought the paraldehyde from the doctor's office. As a matter of fact your own chauffeur drove her down and back in your car. She showed him were he was to stay."

"He told me," Maclain said briefly.

"Is that where you learned that Tubby had been given paraldehyde?"

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"No, Inspector. They spilled some on Tubby's pajamas and on the sheets when they were pouring it in him. The room still reeks of it today." The Captain's forehead wrinkled. "Have you made any effort to trace that telegram?"

"The New York police say none was sent — unless Tubby was using another name and address. Laura Dale was from Ocean City, New Jersey, a small summer resort town. There's been no telegram sent from there to Myron Severn, either care of the Merry-Go-Round or the Broadway Palace Hotel, and neither place has a record of one being received. Laura Dale died a couple of years ago."

The Captain went to the foot of the bed and let his fingers travel in a feather-light journey over the top sheet that lay in a huddled semicircle half on the bed and half on the floor. It was held from falling entirely by the bottom end, still tucked partly in.

For the second time he bent and smelled it. Then he touched an invisible spot, and said to no one, "The paraldehyde spilled here. This end must have been under Tubby's chin."

"About those eight cartridges you gave to Rivers —" Ferguson dragged deeply on his cigarette. "He tells me that you think Severn, who was out at that wreck when Scanlon was shot, took Ted Yates's gun —"

"And unloaded it," Maclain said absently. "He wasn't keeping it to use. He had one of his own, the thirty-eight you found here in this room. You can get in and out of that hotel as easy as you can here — and that's saying something." He brushed the desk top with his hand and touched a leg of the chair still standing in position. "What did you do with the blotter, Inspector? It was on the desk here yesterday."

"Lab." Ferguson looked for an ashtray, then went to the door of the tiny lavatory and disposed of his cigarette in the toilet. "There was a footprint on it from Tubby's slipper — water stain." He paused. "Mrs. Hardesty said she'd retained you, Maclain."

"Yes." The Captain raised the lower half of the old-fashioned ten-foot window, stooped and went out on the balcony. His fingers swiftly brailled the wide wooden railing, then he came back in and closed the window. When it was shut he reached up and touched the top half that was down far enough to leave a two-foot opening near the ceiling.

"She told me about Judge Rafferty and the lemon. I liked that act you put on with Swanny."

"Two years is a long time," said Maclain. "I've found that people confide in me because I'm blind. So I've studied bringing the subject around by my actions instead of questions. Sooner or later, if they are interested and think I'm not, they'll say the things I want to hear them say."

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"What did you want to hear Swanny say?" asked Rivers.

"That Huck didn't get his lemon juice because there was only half a lemon. I think whoever poisoned Rafferty hoped to get Huck, too, had to get him and did get him in a beautiful fashion that passed for suicide." The Captain pointed eloquently up to the ceiling. "Whoever it was is still very much around here, in my opinion. They liked their success with Huck. So Tubby got it the very same way."

"Motives, Maclain?" the Inspector snapped out. "Don't feed me comic strips. I'm not Dick Tracy. Motives. For Judge Rafferty — old and a bum heart — if it was murder. For Huck if it was murder. For Tubby . . ."

"Which we've finally admitted is murder," the Captain broke in. "I hate guessing, Inspector, just as much as you do, but I'll take a stab in the dark that there's just one motive and one killer. Find out who shot Pierre Scanlon in 1950, and why, and you have your package — murderer, motive and everything. I think Judge Rafferty knew, and Huck knew from Rafferty, and Tubby found out and came up here to clinch it. He was after revenge."

"Did Severn ever mention anybody named Tony to you?"

"Tony who?" Maclain straightened up from the foot of the bed where he had been carefully following each fold of the crumpled top sheet again.

"We're guessing now," Rivers admitted. "There was an impression on that blotter that went to the lab with Severn's footprint. Just two words — 'Tony' in caps with an arrow pointing up over it, and a second one not quite so clear following the 'Tony.' It looked like *m-y*-something-*o-n*, but it was written in script, not caps, and Severn was drunk."

"It was obviously Severn's first name — Myron," Ferguson stated decisively. "Severn was sober enough to write it on something during the few minutes he was in this room alone."

The Captain ran his fingers brusquely through his crisp dark hair. "The arrow pointing upward spells 'photograph' to me."

"I'll buy that," said Ferguson. "A group. Tubby marked this 'Tony' and then himself."

"I won't buy that," said Duncan Maclain. "Have you ever labeled yourself in a photograph by writing your own first name? He'd put down 'me' if he intended to send it to anyone. I consider it much more likely that he started to sign it — 'Myron Severn.' " The Captain snapped his fingers. "I'm losing my memory. Have the New York police pick up a taxi driver named Tony Ferri for questioning. He's the one who alibied Hyland on the attempted Severn shooting. Davis mentioned his name to me."

The Lieutenant started out for the pay phone in a booth off the game room downstairs.

The Captain said, "If you see Ted Yates, bring him back up with you,

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Lieutenant."

"Right," Rivers said. The Captain heard his footsteps recede down the hall of Alcohol Alley.

A smell of cooking drifted in through the window.

The Captain said, "Has anything in this room been touched since Tubby was found? The bedclothes, or the chair, or the desk, or the window?"

"It's been locked tight, except when Rivers was here, and my own men. The rope has even been returned to the spot where it was tied on the steam-pipe. You felt it there, yourself."

"The rope is interesting, but something puzzles me more," the Captain said. "Try to get out of a double bed in any manner, drunk or sober, and leave a top sheet as that one is now. It hasn't been pushed down into that position, Inspector, and it wasn't placed there by anyone's hand."

"What the hell are you driving at, Maclain?" Ferguson's mouth and tongue were dry.

"I have to live a life of meticulous order," said Duncan Maclain. "I have to know where everything is, and how it got there. That sheet slipped off of Tubby after his neck was broken. The only thing that's possible is that some terrible force was lifting him through the air, and while he was up there the sheet slipped off of him as a dress might slip off a woman."

"Goddammit, Maclain, you're talking about the supernatural and impossible! I don't like it."

"Neither do I," said Duncan Maclain. "It would seem to indicate that we're up against the most callous, brutal, calculating and cold-blooded murderer it has ever been my misfortune to encounter. There's an element of brutality in all these killings, Inspector, that really fills me with horror." The Captain paused and pinched his cleft chin tightly between thumb and finger. "I can understand killings that grow out of fear, or even revenge, but the long-range planner —" Maclain slowly shook his head. "Well, it took a lot of long-range planning to knot that rope the way it was knotted and it took a lot of rope to get that sheet there."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Inspector gave Maclain a hand and the Captain stepped down lightly from chair to desk and from desk to floor. His rubber-soled shoes were soundless as he started another tour of the bedroom.

"You're driving me nuts," Ferguson blurted out finally. "For Christ's

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sake, sit down!"

"Where did the other three chairs come from? The other rooms have only two, an armchair and a hard one."

"They were brought in yesterday when the mob was here, I suppose. Rivers will know."

"I hope your men didn't photograph them when they shot this room. That's apt to throw things out of proportion if they ever get before a jury."

"My men are pretty good at their business."

"We're facing something better than good, Inspector." Maclain sat down. "Can I bum a cigarette? Swanny wouldn't let you smoke if you'd just discovered your sister had been murdered."

"Check," said Ferguson and gave him one. His piercing eyes were on Maclain as he held a light. "You think we're up against a tough conviction even if we ever get our man?"

"Or our woman." The Captain blew a perfect smoke ring that floated off through the warm air. "Don't you?"

"*Cherchez la femme* to hell!" Ferguson made a protesting gesture, remembered suddenly Maclain couldn't see and translated it into a noise with his lips that sounded like a bubbling drain. "Now it's a dame, aided and abetted by Swanny and Muscles, the other two trainers and the last Mr. America, all doing the clean-and-jerk together. Vun! Two! Three! Gentlemen, upsadaisy!"

"I'm anxious for suggestions." The Captain puffed dreamily.

"I suggest that the only way a dame got him up there was to shoot him out of a cannon. . . . There aren't any ashtrays or I'd give you one."

"But if a man hanged Tubby, then you *can* tell me how it was done." The Captain flipped his ashes on the floor. "He was up there, Inspector. Your own laboratory says he jumped . . ."

"And the autopsy says he couldn't." Ferguson's voice grew savage. "Listen, Maclain, I'm no kid with a junior G-man's button on. Hardesty was hanged, or hanged himself with a three-quarter-inch piece of Manila rope. So, if, and, or, but, did Severn.

"Now, I've handled a couple of phony hangings," the Inspector went on. "One was a girl who got a little bit pregnant at the same time her boy friend got a little bit scared that wedding bells were going to bong. He strangled her, then hung her up with a bathrobe cord — but he tied the knot at the side of her neck instead of in back as he should have done. Do you know what sent him to the chair?"

The Captain stepped on his cigarette.

"If you're qualifying me for a trooper's job, Inspector, I think I can pass. That was strangulation, as most so-called hangings are. The victim's face is

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almost invariably red if the knot was tied at the side of the neck because of compression of the veins and arteries on that side. If the knot was in back, the girl's face should have been pale."

"Well, this young killer's face was redder than the girl's when he went to the chair — and I'm really not trying to test you." The Inspector's chair scraped as he pushed it a trifle backward toward the wall. "I'm thinking out loud, which is a hell of a bad habit for a man in the B.C.I. . . .

"What I'm driving at is, when a murdered person is hanged identical marks are produced with those of strangulation. No autopsy, or examination of the marks, will prove if the victim was hanged after death or not — so it's a neat way of faking a suicide to cover poisoning or choking with the hands." The Inspector smacked a fist in his palm. "Have you ever encountered a case where a living person was hanged by another? Rivers tells me you've dealt with fancier types than I have. Mine are mostly hit-and-run."

"I've only encountered one before now in twenty-five years of trying to prove to the world that a blind man can see. The killer used an Australian stock whip," Maclain told him.

"Why?"

"Because he was the son of an Australian rancher, and brought up to use one. He could break a victim's neck at fifteen paces, but it wasn't a fancy method of murder to him although, God knows, it was to the New York police and me. There isn't anything fancy here, either, Inspector. We'll find that out when we find the murderer — man or woman."

"Get the woman off your chest, Maclain. What woman?"

"The wife Tubby had in Bedford prison, for one."

"There's a tag out for her already. We're trying to trace her through parole. She'd be past probation and there would be no check on her. She might have moved anywhere, married, changed her name."

"What about an ad?" The Captain's head went up in a gesture of listening. "Come on in, Ted," he called. "Last on the right at the end of the hall."

Ferguson said, "How the hell did you know that was Yates?"

"Ears," said Maclain. "His cane along the baseboard of the wall. I heard him as soon as he turned into the hall."

Ted came in, found the free chair with his cane and sat down. "Lieutenant Rivers said you wanted me. He's tied up with a couple of reporters in the office downstairs."

"Maybe this convict wife will show when the news hits the papers," the Captain said thoughtfully. "It may be a good thing after all." He turned. "Did you ever hear Tubby say he was married?"

"Never."

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"We heard he had a wife in prison years ago."

"Where did you get that?"

"From Father Garvey, a priest at St. Francis' Shelter," Maclain said. "Was there any particular woman Tubby was close to that you happen to know of, Ted?"

"There was a picture on his desk in a silver frame — a blonde chick that I told him once I'd like to meet. He didn't come through, but when I went to his rooms a couple of days later, I felt around and the picture was gone."

"I've been watching Maclain," the Inspector said. "I think I'd better give my attention to you. How the hell did you know this chick was a blonde? Does the Army train you blinded vets to smell coloring, too?"

Ted laughed. "Tubby used to talk to the picture when he got tight. I went to his room one evening and stopped outside the door — thought someone was with him, so I knocked and went in. I asked him who the girl was he'd been talking to, so he introduced me to the 'beautiful blonde of the picture,' as he called her. He described her big blue eyes, her baby face and her blonde hair, but when I asked her name he clammed up tight."

"It's a lead," said Ferguson. "Something else New York can look into."

"Then there's the woman on the train," the Captain said. "The one that talked to Scanlon. I think you said, Ted, you'd put your money on the vanishing dame. Would her description fit Tubby's picture?"

"I only got about half a look," Ted said. "I'd gone to the club car to nail a seat after leaving my gun and kit in the compartment. In the club car, I ran into an enlisted man who was stationed awhile at the Point. He said he'd save a seat for me, so I went back for a minute to check with Frenchy."

"That's Scanlon, the General?" Ferguson asked.

"Yes, sir. A woman was standing with her back to the aisle partly in the compartment door. As I started down the aisle she went on in and closed the door. I started to ring the buzzer by the door, then changed my mind and went back to the club car. The train started ten minutes later."

"Do you remember how the woman was dressed?" the Captain asked. "It was very cold, wasn't it? Was she wearing a fur coat or was she in ordinary clothes? What I'm driving at is — do you think she was another passenger, or just seeing someone off on the train?"

"I can tell you that," Ted said. "It's a damn funny thing, but as many times as I've been over this nobody's asked that question before. She had a heavy hooded cape on."

"Like a nurse?" The Captain got to his feet in a single lithe motion.

"It might have been a nurse's cape, at that," Ted said after a moment. "As I've told you, nobody asked me, and I hadn't even thought of it before."

"Was this enlisted man you met in the club car killed in the wreck?" the

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Captain asked.

"Hell, no," Ted said. "He was pinned down near me when the car derailed and turned on its side, and damn lucky, too. He's the one who gave me my alibi — Sergeant Tony Ferri."

"He hands them out like tickets," said Duncan Maclain. "Has it struck you, Inspector, that alibis always run in pairs? The man who gives an alibi gives one to himself as well as you."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"I DON'T LIKE POLICE," Jim Hyland said.

He and Anne were walking over the grounds on their regular afternoon tour of inspection. Today the Captain had asked to go along. He had walked in silence for some time, his hand nestling lightly in the crook of Anne's soft arm.

"Any particular reason?" Maclain asked idly.

"Matt Snowden gave me an envelope when he and Sam Weisman were here in 'forty-nine. It had one thousand in it — ten one hundreds. I put it in the safe. When he checked out two weeks later the envelope was gone. That's all. The police still think I took it."

"Was Huck insured?"

"The company claimed it was an inside job," Anne said in a troubled voice. "Huck made it good to Snowden, and later got the company to settle."

"Settle is right," Jim said. "I think Huck got half, less lawyers' fees. Now the police think I tried to get Tubby in New York, and then broke his neck up here and hauled him up like a bale of hay."

"Your simile rather interests me," the Captain said. "Why like a bale of hay?"

They had walked a few steps before Jim replied. "I was brought up on a farm. I guess that's it. I've forgotten how many bales I've seen hoisted into the stables — just a rope through a block on the end of a swinging arm." He was silent for a few more steps, then added as though he was thinking out loud, "Somebody got him up there some way."

Jim went in to look over the empty cow shed and stables.

"Same old stuff," he said when he rejoined them. "Tack room's been used for a hobo nest, and some drunk's been sleeping in one of the stalls and smoking."

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"Anything missing?" Anne asked him.

"There's nothing movable that's worth a dime left. Somebody's even untied the pulley from the derrick arm in the hayloft. I thought I'd get it to show to Captain Maclain."

"It's been gone for two years or more, Jim," Anne said. "Bill Laverty wanted it last year to rig some kind of tackle. It seems strange you haven't noticed that before today."

"Don't let's start a fight about it." Jim's voice was pleading. "I just happened to be thinking about hauling up hay."

At the farmhouse used by Dr. Buchanan they found Cappo busy polishing the Cadillac into a dazzling glow. The Captain handed him a folded five-dollar bill. "Drive to town and get me a carton of cigarettes, Cappo, and bring my portable typewriter to my room, please. I have some letters to get off."

"Yes, sir, Captain."

Cappo watched them down the road for a ways, then unfolded the note inside of the five-dollar bill and read it.

> Is there a nurse's cloak anywhere in the doctor's house? Could anyone walk in the doctor's office and take out drugs or poisons? Cyanide? Nembutal? Check the hayloft in the barn and see if you can locate any large pulleys that will take ¾ inch rope. More important — can you see where any pulley was taken away?

Duncan Maclain had written the note an hour before he started his walk with Jim and Anne. During the walk a picture painted by farm odors and words had formed in his mind, and a finger dipped in icy water had touched its tip to the end of his spine.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE CAPTAIN HAD Schnucke out for an after-dinner walk when Cappo drove the Cadillac up and stopped beside him.

Cars were like people to Maclain, distinguishable instantly, once he knew them, by sounds and actions. He knew his own by a definite purr of the motor, an indefinable hum of the generator as it gathered speed, and an accented, slowly diminishing swirl of tires on road as Cappo braked it down.

Nevertheless he was cautious. In his whole career he never forgot that a murderer was anyone driven to desperation, and might have a brain as good

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as his, or better, plus the very important asset of being able to see.

Twice in New York he had saved himself, if not from death, from a lot of dangerous trouble by refusing to accept the first taxi that swooped up at his signal.

Lieutenant Rivers had told him before dinner that the New York police couldn't locate Tony Ferri. He owned his own cab and that had been found in the taxi garage where he parked it, but the owner-driver hadn't been seen for twenty-four hours. A checkup of his boarding place in Brooklyn brought the same results. Tony Ferri, the alibi giver, had quietly left the scene.

Cappo said, "I put your typewriter in your room, Captain."

Maclain opened the door to the driver's compartment, ordered Schnucke forward and followed her in. When she was settled between his knees he asked Cappo, "Why did you bring the car?"

"A Mr. Snowden wants to talk to you, Captain, sir, at the Jug and Grouse. He's having dinner there with a Mr. Weisman. Eight, he said. It's almost that now."

The Jug and Grouse was a famous inn, run by Fred and Frankie Charles, a few miles north of Huck's. The Captain knew the Charles couple quite well and had eaten there many times before.

"That's Matt Snowden, a guest here?"

"Yes, sir, Captain. He said he was breaking training tonight. He and Mr. Weisman are leaving tomorrow — that is, he said, if the police decide to let them go."

Maclain said, "Drive me there." When the car was under way he asked, "What about those things I wanted to know?"

"I'd say it was yes to all of 'em, Captain, sir. I had right smart trouble finding the cloak . . ."

"But you located it in a storage room," Maclain broke in. "I hope you haven't been near the doctor or Mrs. Buchanan since. They'll have you arrested for breaking and entering. You should air yourself when you've been around a moth-proofed closet, Cappo."

"I had a bath and changed my clothes, but I'll never change that nose of yours, Captain. That stuff must have stunk up my hair." He slowed for a crossroad. "There's anything you want in the doctor's office, Captain. Looked to me mighty like he runs his own drug store there, and the door ain't never locked at all. I didn't see no pulleys, Captain . . ."

"Don't bother about the pulleys," Maclain interrupted. "I heard about one after I wrote you that note today."

"Yes, sir, Captain." Cappo drove on.

Fred Charles greeted Maclain at the door of the Jug and Grouse. Frankie,

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breezy, effusive and capable, bustled up a moment later, kissed the Captain warmly and took him in charge.

"Have you eaten?"

"Rare roast beef, spinach . . ."

"And iced tea." Frankie took his arm. "I know Huck's better than you. We've had a motto for years — the Jug and Grouse fattens them up so Huck's can carve them down. We're working on Matt and Sam upstairs in the private dining room. They're getting over two weeks of Swanny with a small snack of sirloins garnished with lobster thermidor. They're waiting for you. Come along."

She guided Maclain past the subdued hum of diners and clink of fine china that came from the main dining room, up a short flight of stairs, and left him with Snowden and Weisman in a small low-ceilinged room.

The smell of fine food, good coffee and a rich cigar saluted him.

Matt Snowden, whose placid round face and jovial manner cloaked a quietly pugnacious disposition, left his chair and seated Maclain with a hearty, "Well, well, another prisoner escaped from Drill Sergeant Swanny to the Yug and Grouse! Sit down, sit down. Have some dinner — full of calories. Have some *Liebfraumilch* — ice cold. Have a cigar."

"Your German is remarkable, Matt," Sam Weisman said in his cultured voice as Maclain sat down. "The pronunciation is *milch* with a hard *k*, not *milsh*. It's enough to sour the wine."

The Captain laughed. "I'll try some anyhow, Mr. Snowden. It beats Swanny's lemon juice, and I'm a pushover for Rhine wine."

Snowden poured and said, "What the hell's the difference, Sam? It all comes out of the same long bottle. If you didn't have a better education I wouldn't retain you at fifteen grand a year."

A colored waiter came in and cleared away. Matt told a pretty good story about a talking racehorse. The Captain savored the icy flavor of the Rhineland vineyards, cool against his tongue.

Matt said to the waiter, "See this bottle, Eddie?"

"Yessir."

"Well, it's empty. Ice us up another one."

"Yessir. *Liebfraumilch*, 'forty-seven."

Sam laughed. "Your German's pretty good, Eddie."

"Yessir. Four years there in the Army." He went out.

Matt said, "Hell, Sam, that's his business. If I was a waiter I'd know how to pronounce French and German, too." He pushed back his chair. "You have a P.I. license, I understand, Captain. Mary Hardesty says she's retained you."

The Captain said, "That's true." He took out his wallet, opened it and

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pushed it across the table so that the private investigator's card with his picture under the celluloid was in view.

Matt took a look and passed it across to Sam Weisman. "It beats hell, Sam, but I guess it's true."

Weisman studied it briefly, then returned it. "I was looking at it more as a matter of interest than anything else," he said. "I've heard of you many times, Captain. On my advice, Matt asked you to meet us here . . ."

Matt broke in, "You're working for Mary for coffee and cakes. I happen to know because you're interested in clearing that blind lieutenant. I'd like to retain you, too."

"For what, Mr. Snowden?" The Captain lit a cigarette. Weisman gave him an ashtray.

"Make it Matt and Sam," Snowden said. "*Mister* makes me nervous. I'll pay you a thousand cash right now, and another thousand when you nail the guy who murdered Severn."

"I'm working on it without your paying me," the Captain said. "Why should I take your money? The police are on it, too. They're much more competent and better organized than I can ever hope to be."

"We're mad at each other," Matt said around his cigar. "I could tell the cops a lot of things about why Tubby Severn came up here to Huck's and why he was killed. The trouble is I don't speak to the cops and they don't speak to me. Sam says if I retain you, you can use your own judgment about what I pass on to you, and that you don't have to sing about where it came from."

"In other words, Captain," Sam explained, "you have a private investigator's professional immunity where a client is concerned."

The Captain smoked for a silent half-minute. Eddie came in with the ice bucket, opened the wine, refilled their glasses and went away.

The Captain snuffed his cigarette and tasted his wine. He said, "I have an independent income, Mr. Snowden. I went into this P.I. racket to prove to myself that I was better than any crook who had eyes to see. You have a reputation of being a damn big operator and on the level, but I work with the police, and, in your own words, you and the cops are mad at each other. Whatever I may think of our lousy laws against gambling, I'm afraid I can't take your money from you."

"Okay," Matt said. "You don't want to work for me."

"I didn't say that, Mr. Snowden." The Captain made a noncommittal gesture with his wine glass. "Answer me just one question. Why are you so anxious that this murderer be found?"

"Tubby was killed for what he knew," Matt said. "So was Scanlon, Huck and old Judge Rafferty. I fed Tubby most of his info on how to run a night

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club, make money, and keep it clean. In other words, as Sam always puts it, I knew a hell of a sight more about certain things than Tubby did. I'm having plenty of headaches over this political gambling investigation which shows up every election year. If Tubby's killer isn't nailed quick, how long, question mark, before he gets around to shooting, hanging, or poisoning me? End quote."

"If you'll take my word that nothing you say will be passed along," the Captain said, "I'll work for you. Only it has to be my way and for free."

"You're hired," Matt said. "Drive down to New York tomorrow and talk to Jake Patman. He was Tubby's partner and probably owns the Merry-Go-Round now. He was financed by Tubby. I'll give you a note. Tell Jake to put you in touch with anyone who knows where Tony Ferri is hiding out. Try to talk to Ferri, yourself, but let him know that you're covered . . ."

"How covered?" the Captain asked.

"That Jake knows you're going to see him, or that you have a couple of friendly yeggs watching the house who'll beat him to death if you don't come out. He's scared, or he never would have ducked and left his cab. Also he's a bad boy, Captain. Take it from me."

"Did Tubby have a picture of this Ferri?" the Captain asked.

"In the background of a crowd around Laura Dale, the movie actress," Matt said. "It was a publicity photo, shot while she was boarding that train to Florida. She died a week or so later. He wanted me to identify Tony, and was bringing that picture up for me to see. He thought it was going to clean up Scanlon's murder."

"But Ferri admitted he was on the train." The Captain's forehead was furrowed. "He gave Ted Yates an alibi."

"And Jim Hyland one, too," Sam Weisman reminded him.

"It doesn't fit." The Captain drained his wine glass. He set it down. "Tubby marked that picture, Matt, but it was taken from his room when he was killed. He had down 'Tony' and what looked like his own first name, 'Myron.' The police found the indentations on the blotter. Was Tony related to Tubby?"

"He was the bastard son of a con named Ferri." Matt laughed unpleasantly.

"I was thinking that Tubby might have written 'Tony — my son,' " the Captain said.

Matt said, "Not from anything Myron Severn, drunk or sober, ever said to me. Tubby wasn't the type to spend two years sending any son but a son of a bitch to the Sing Sing death chair."

"I think I'd better find a copy of that picture," said Duncan Maclain.

"When you get it, let me see it," Matt said. "I don't use checks in my

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business, but I have a habit of marking hundred-dollar bills to find out if they're sticking to anybody's fingers. I had a grand pinched from Huck's a few years ago. It showed up in the office of an abortionist in Kingston after the joint was raided. I was told about it by a friend in the courthouse when Judge Rafferty sent this Dr. Husenby up the river. I couldn't do anything about it, but maybe the guy or doll who paid the jack to the good old doc is in the picture. From what Tubby told me, everybody who was remotely connected with Frenchy Scanlon seems to be there."

It was late when the Captain got back to Huck's. He went in very quietly, up to his room with his catlike tread, and stopped outside his door.

The smell of cigarette smoke was strong.

He turned the knob with silent fingers and flung wide the door.

"Remember me?" a familiar voice asked him from the bed. "Your neglected partner and erstwhile brains, Samuel Savage?"

"Spud!" The Captain's sightless eyes were smarting, but his voice was firm. "What the hell are you doing here?"

"You're married now, old boy," Spud said. "And we see by the papers that you're playing around with murders. Sybella sent me and you better not try to throw me out. That animal growling at you from the corner is your little dog, Dreist!"

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE BED LIGHT CAST a circle of brightness that took in a glass of water, another glass one-third full of whiskey, an apple, and a saucer the apple had been on. The saucer was loaded now with ashes and butts, and a threadlike line of acrid smoke drifted up from the ash heap to be lost under the lamp shade and dissipated into the murkiness of the room.

Spud Savage, clad in a pair of shorts, raised himself from the comfortable position that utilized the two pillows on the Captain's bed and added another butt to the saucer.

"It's the rope that's got me blowing my tibby," Spud said, "and that knot in it."

"As I told you, the rope had been tied three times in the same place to make a lump in it a little over two inches in diameter," the Captain repeated. "After the rope was wound on the pipe, the end was tied once around under that lump. Why?"

"So it couldn't slip," Spud suggested.

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"So it couldn't slip if it had just been two single knots," Maclain said sleepily. "Two single slip knots tying a rope or a piece of line together are called a fisherman's knot. They can't get by each other and the more you pull them the tighter they get. Why should one be a single knot and the other one a triple knot? Why would a murderer waste unnecessary time?"

"Okay," Spud said. "Why?"

"That's a question that I asked our very efficient officers of the B.C.I." The Captain crossed his shapely feet and slid down a little farther in his chair. "They haven't yet answered me."

"It works out very nicely, Dunc. Everything fits to an inch."

"You're damn right everything fits to an inch," said Duncan Maclain. "It fitted with Tubby and the next time anyone's hanged up here it will fit to an inch again — storm and all."

"You mean Huck was hanged in a storm?"

"Had to be." The Captain nodded slowly. "Noise, Spud. A storm covers noise. I tried to point that out to the B.C.I. — the fact that these two murders, Huck's and Tubby's, are identical. Huck's was listed suicide. This one would have been, except for the paraldehyde. It's still unsolved, yet . . ."

"Yet what?" Spud asked.

The Captain twisted uneasily. "Spud, the upper half of that triple knot was mashed quite flat. I felt it. I also got myself laughed at. I don't like to be laughed at, Spud. It puts a chock on my brain."

The room was still. From across the hall came the sound of a walk weary customer's snores. The Captain touched his braille wrist watch. It was twenty-past two.

"I do know this. We're up against a killer who's gotten the habit. He's quit regarding murder as murder and begun playing it like a game. That isn't a knot in that rope, Spud. It's a chock to keep the rope from running too far through a pulley. How the hell can I tell a hardboiled inspector of the state police that he's looking for a lunatic who thinks he's discovered a hanging machine?"

The Captain undressed quickly after Spud had taken Dreist and gone to his room. In dressing gown and slippers he gently opened his door and stepped with feet that made no sound out into the hall.

A moment later without a noise to betray his presence he was standing by the bed in No. 28.

He could hear Ted Yates's regular breathing.

The Captain touched the light bulb in the table lamp beside the bed and drew back his finger quickly before he got a burn.

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Ted had undoubtedly fallen asleep some hours before and left his light on.

The Captain's trained fingers traveled over the bedside table. There was nothing on it but Ted's wrist watch and the apple put nightly in every room.

Still moving like a shadow he went into the lavatory, found a half-full water glass and emptied it quickly into the sink, letting the water trickle between his fingers.

Two plastic eyes lay in his palm. With his forefinger, he traced the contours of each. A muscle twitched painfully along the length of his jaw.

Water trickled silently into the glass as he turned the faucet. It was nearly half-full again when Huck's ancient plumbing played a trick. Air pressure backed up in the pipes and the lavatory was suddenly hideous with a shattering roar.

The Captain shut it off with a jerk, then dropped the eyes into the glass and stood silently listening.

Ted sat quickly up in bed.

"Who the hell is it? Is there somebody in my room?" He moved the sheet and started to get up.

Maclain had reached the side of the bed in three soundless strides. An object slid from the bed and struck against his slippered foot.

"It's Duncan Maclain, Ted. Take it easy. My partner just got in and saw your light on. I came in to put it out. That's all."

The Captain bent silently and picked up the quarter book that had fallen to the floor.

Ted said, "You scared me! Anne read to me for an hour last night while Joan was on duty. I must have fallen asleep."

"Well, fall asleep again," the Captain told him and switched off the light. "Good night."

Ten seconds later he was in Spud's room.

"What book's this?"

"Pocket Book, quarter edition, *Dutch Shoe Mystery*, Ellery Queen," Spud said.

"There's a corner turned down. What page?"

"Forty-four. Starts Chapter Seven. Chapter title — 'Impersonation.' "

"Read up to there before you go to sleep," said Duncan Maclain. "Then through Seven and two chapters more — and remember it, Spud."

"Then what?"

"Be damn careful, but get it back in Ted Yates's room under the bed on the floor."

"What's the deal, Dunc?"

"Find out tomorrow how much of that book Ted has heard, and how

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much Anne says she's read to him."

"My God, Dunc, you're not suspicious of Yates, are you?"

"No," Maclain said, "but Ferguson is, and I'm damn suspicious of the person who is trying to make people think that Ted can see."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

FOURTEEN AUTOMOBILES in a glittering array were parked on the graveled quadrangle in front of the porte-cochere.

In the blue convertible, farthest from the guests awaiting the sound of the lunch bell on the porch, Joan and Ted Yates were sitting with the top down.

"Six new guests this morning," Joan said, "and only two checkouts." She stared out over the hills. The day was clear and sparkling and the somber buildings of West Point were visible across the Hudson. "Nine inquiries about rates in the morning mail. Apparently any kind of publicity is good — even murder."

Ted put his hand down on the hot leather of the seat beside him and said, "Mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the noonday sun."

"It's no use, is it?" Joan looked at him for a moment, then gently touched his arm.

"What?"

"This," she said. "All of it. You and me." Her voice was cool. "Can't we go back, Ted?"

"You mean back to those good old days at the Point when Yates could see?" His tone was ironic. "Sure. Why don't I take up football again? I might train a dog to run interference for me. Maybe another general will see me, think what a monstrous clever fellow I am, and then fall in love with my girl and do something big for me."

"I suppose you're talking about General Scanlon." Her lips barely moved. "I've always known since I met you, Ted, that you were a little jealous. I thought it was kid stuff and that you'd outgrow it. It seems to have changed into stupidity."

"That's a hot one." Ted's laugh was forced to a point of being nasty. "How stupid do you have to be just to hear things?"

"I'm sure I don't know." She sat statue-like, her face and body rigid. "Why don't you tell me?"

"About Frenchy?" he asked in a mocking tone. "God's gift to females?"

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"Yes, tell me about God's gift to females." She was feeling the strain of her immobility and her voice was very low.

"Oh God, Joan!" Ted suddenly went to pieces. "What did you do after I left you in the New Yorker Bar when I was leaving for Florida?"

"I had a couple of drinks." She drew her lower lip in between her white teeth and stared at Ted with bright curious eyes as though she might have found some stranger in the car. "Then I sat for a while and finally decided I couldn't face Huck and Mary and Alice and Dr. Buchanan, who were meeting me there. I left word for them with the hostess. It was snowing, you remember. I took a train to Philipstown and a taxi from the station here."

Ted removed his dark glasses and pressed his palms against his eyes, then put on his glasses again. "I'll tell you what I was told," he said, "part in Florida and part by mail in Korea. I was told you were having an affair with Scanlon right under my nose — and that he got you in trouble."

"Ted . . ."

"Wait, Joan, this was tough to take and tougher to tell to you. I was told you took Alice Buchanan's old nursing cloak to New York with you — and wore it to disguise yourself when you went to see Frenchy on the train. You asked for help or marriage and he turned you down on both."

"So knowing the train was going to be wrecked, I shot him?" Joan's voice was wretched. A shadow had driven the peace from her deep blue eyes and replaced it with fear. "Then I escaped from the wreck on an ambulance, leaving you to take the blame?"

"You were supposed to have bought a ticket to Philadelphia, intending to get off at Newark and come back from there. I can't . . . It isn't fair, Joan."

"Right now, Ted, stopping isn't fair. The police must be told, and Captain Maclain."

"Joan, listen." He found her icy hand and almost crushed it in his powerful grip. "They'll hear it, anyhow — when they catch Ferri. He's the one who told me. He's the one who said that after Frenchy died he, Ferri, helped you get an illegal operation, and got the money for you to pay a doctor in Kingston. Don't talk, Joan. I haven't."

"Why not?"

"For the same reason *you* shouldn't — for the reason that brought me up here, Joan, to ask you to have me, blindness and all, and to let me try to help and protect you. You couldn't have known this unless I told you — because it didn't happen. Yet, even without a word of truth behind it, if it gets out it can wreck you."

"Do you realize what this implies?" she asked him very distinctly. "It would mean I'm a murderer four times over. Scanlon, Rafferty, my father,

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and Tubby. . . . Do you love me, Ted?"

"Better than life, or I couldn't have come back here fearing your pity."

"Then let's get married as quickly as we can. We'll get a license this afternoon and get our blood tests made by Dr. Buchanan. It will only take a few days to have them come through."

"The quicker the better," Ted said, and kissed her warmly.

Her cold slender fingers entwined with his own. "I'm very happy," she said. "I know somehow that as long as I live you'll never believe anything about me that isn't true."

Ted said, "Tony Ferri's a blackmailer. Nothing the bastard ever said was true."

Inspector John Ferguson put a cigarette in his mouth and reached for a match. A lighter flashed under his nose and a flame shot up that almost singed his hair.

"Goddammit, Lucey," he roared at the attentive sergeant standing beside him, lighter in hand. "Get yourself a waiter's job if you have to burn someone's eyebrows off every time they want to smoke."

"Yes, sir." Sergeant Lucey smothered a grin and held the lighter farther away while Ferguson used the flame.

The Inspector turned his attention to Rivers, seated across the desk from him. "Look, Tom, I didn't ask to get into this national crime wave that's been going on up at that muscle factory. It's just the only way I have to make a living. It's your little ice wagon." He flipped open a folder in front of him. "Get the lead out of your pants and drag around a chair."

The Lieutenant removed the lead from his pants and dragged around a chair.

"Snowden and that ambulance chaser, Weisman, checked out this morning, I see."

"Yes, sir. They'd been questioned. Everyone in the place has been questioned. Weisman pointed out to me that I could hold them as material witnesses if I wanted to. They were ready to post bond. Weisman also pointed out that Matt Snowden is one of the big wheels in this gambling investigation, and that the New York police would like to have him handled with a certain amount of care. Snowden, it seems, has friends here and there."

"That's a hell of a sight more than I have." The Inspector read a typewritten paragraph in the open file and said a dirty word. "This Severn, deceased — Rivers, didn't he belong to anybody or anything? Didn't he have any relatives except a night club and a missing ex-wife parolee? No dames? No bank account? No money?"

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"If you'll read a little farther you'll see the name of his bank and the fact that he had eleven thousand dollars odd on deposit," Rivers said patiently.

"Well, the bank didn't kill him for his money," Ferguson growled. "Who did, Tom? What about this fleabag where he lived? Was he born and raised there? Surely to God, he didn't sleep alone every night. Was he a sex pervert or queer? Dammit, Lieutenant, there must be a wren in this thing tucked away somewhere. Did you get anything on that picture in Severn's room? The one that blind man saw."

"Dead end," said Rivers. "It was a photograph of Laura Dale. There must be a hundred thousand in existence. Severn must have been a fan."

Ferguson leaned back in his chair and stared at Rivers with jet-black eyes turned hard. "That Yates is quite a number, Tom. Scanlon was gunned in New Jersey. Let's start helping the New Jersey police for a minute or two and work on that murder. We may get a B.C.I. show put on TV. Yates was aide to Big Brass Scanlon, wasn't he?"

"Yes, sir."

"And when Big Brass was retired from active duty by a forty-five slug this blind hero wasn't blind, was he?"

"No, sir."

"Well, get your mind to work, Rivers, and quit yessing me. It struck me this Yates was pretty glib, the way he dug that one out of the hat about Severn, deceased, and the talking picture. Remember?"

"I was downstairs talking to reporters," Rivers reminded him.

"Hell, you would be! Yates tells me about a blonde chick in the picture and I ask him how the hell he knows she's blonde and he says . . ."

" 'Severn introduced me to the beautiful blonde in the picture,' " the Lieutenant finished for him. "It's all in the report, Inspector."

"So it's in the report," Ferguson said. "Well, keep it in mind, Rivers. Why wouldn't Severn tell him the photo was Laura Dale. I think Yates lied. Why would this Yates want to rid the world of a general?"

"Maybe he doesn't like officers," Sergeant Lucey put in.

"Get the hell in the radio room and take that telephone call. It's been ringing its head off."

"Twice, sir." The Sergeant left with another smothered grin.

"Maybe he doesn't like officers, at that." The Inspector spoke slowly, pulling gently at the lobe of his ear. "Maybe he doesn't like one in particular more than he doesn't like the others. Why? Because the one . . ." He stopped and pinched his lips between finger and thumb. "Find out, Tom, if Scanlon was ever known to have cast any eyes on one Joan Hardesty at any time. Now, by God, if I could dig up any motive for killing Severn —"

Sergeant Lucey came back in and said, "New York reports that Myron

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Severn left a will with his partner Jake Patman who runs the Merry-Go-Round. It leaves fifty thousand outright to Ted Yates, and a balance of about thirty thousand to Ted Yates's father, Harold Yates, of Evanston, Illinois. Severn's body is to be shipped to Evanston for burial. There are a few minor . . ."

"The hell with the minors," Ferguson broke in. "Get on the job, Lieutenant, and find out how Yates pulled this job of hanging Severn. I knew the minute I laid eyes on him that guy could see!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

JAKE PATMAN PUSHED four bills from wholesale grocers, two requests for donations to charity, and six unopened envelopes that he judged to be more requests because of their looks, into the ever-increasing clutter on his desk.

He carefully smoothed out the fancy sheet of Jug and Grouse writing paper. He read the note signed with a familiar capital *M* and a scrawl after it that only Matt Snowden believed looked like *att.* While he was shredding the paper and dropping it piece by piece into an oversize wastebasket, he swung slowly around in his creaky swivel chair.

He looked first at the German shepherd with the brace on her back, and then at Captain Duncan Maclain. It took him all of five seconds to add up the cost of the Captain's light-gray suit, shoes, sox, shirt and tie.

"Are you serious, mister?" Jake asked in his smooth soft voice.

"About talking to Tony Ferri?" The Captain smiled but it didn't make him look happy. "Do I look like some nut who drove down here from Hardesty's to waste your time?"

"No," Jake said. "I'm thinking about your wife. You're married, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Have you got enough insurance that she'll be happy if you happen to die?"

"I don't happen to think that talking to Ferri is necessarily fatal," the Captain said. "I've held a lot of conversations that the police considered much more lethal."

"Lethal, huh? Did you pull that word on Matt last night? He'd like it. It's refined. Tubby would have liked it. He thought Ferri was lethal."

"Do you know Ferri, yourself?"

"I don't want to, mister." The swivel chair creaked as Jake leaned back.

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"Neither do you."

Maclain stood up and Schnucke got up beside him. "Tubby had marked a picture of a group with 'Tony' and what might be 'my son.' The indentations were on the blotter in his room. Matt says Ferri wasn't Tubby's son."

"He wasn't," Jake said positively.

"Did he have one?" Maclain was casual, turned halfway toward the door to go.

"I knew a lot of things about him," Jake said, "but I never heard him mention a kid of his own. He was only married the once. That was plenty. He left his dough to that blind veteran who's up there with you."

The Captain turned back to face Jake again. "If it's any of my business, how do you happen to know?"

"He left a will with me. I filed it with my lawyer to handle the red tape as soon as I heard Ferri got him."

"You think Ferri got him?"

"I said so. They were after each other in different ways. Ferri shot an eleven and Tubby threw boxcars."

"Did you know that Huck Hardesty was hanged in the same room as Tubby, with a rope knotted in the same way? Do you think Tony Ferri killed him, too?"

"He won't tell you if you ask him," Jake said. "He'll just look you over while you're talking and measure a coffin up for you. He's bad news from a bad family, mister. I wouldn't fool you."

"Do you think Tony Ferri shot General Scanlon on that wrecked train a couple of years ago?"

"If Tony was close enough to shoot him and the general had fifty cents on him, I think Tony killed him for the money. Tubby thought he killed Scanlon. Tubby thought he blasted at him Tuesday night. Why, don't you?"

"If you had just murdered a man on a train, would you come forward and give another man an alibi?" the Captain asked.

"That depends," Jake said. "I might if it gave me one, too."

"If you got away with it the first time, would you try it again two years later — when you'd missed somebody, shooting at him in a bar?"

"Tony didn't miss shooting anybody in a bar, mister. He's been a rod for various mobsters since he was old enough to steal his first car. He doesn't miss at long range. Take the weight off your feet for a minute. You're getting me into an Irish stew."

"You mean you think Tony followed my car up to Huck's and hanged Tubby, and that Tony also shot Scanlon, but he wasn't the one who shot at Tubby and then knocked down Yates in front of the hotel?" The Cap-

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tain sat down.

"You did pretty well trying to fill that flush with a two-card draw," Jake said. "One card's red, but the other one's a spade. I think Tony was driving the murder hack last Tuesday night — only it wasn't a murder because whoever intended to get Tubby should have hired Tony not only to drive but to do the shooting. Get it?"

"Yes," Maclain said. "What's the black card in this red four-flush I'm holding?"

"The black card is the ace of spades, the death card that I'm trying to get you to throw away. Tony owns his own cab and drives it, where and if. He has a room in Brooklyn that he uses, when and if. But if the police wanted real bad to find him they'd stop looking in New York and Brooklyn and start looking where he lives with a frill — that's up in Peekskill, New York, about ten miles from Huck's. No, sir, I don't think Tony followed you to Huck's. It's my opinion he was hanging around there waiting for Tubby when you arrived."

"How could he find out we were going there?"

Jake laughed. "Now ain't that a hell of a one to have a detective ask you? What about word left here or at his hotel and that instrument called the telephone?"

The Captain skillfully put a cigarette in his holder and lit it while Jake's gray-blue eyes watched with approval. "There's another angle to this I can't figure out," Maclain said. "Jim Hyland, the manager at Huck's, gets an alibi from Tony. If Tony was driving the murder cab, as you say, then Hyland's guilty — at least, of shooting at Severn."

"Go on, deal your cards," Jake said. "I'm listening."

"Now if Hyland isn't guilty, then he picked up a cab in front of the hotel a few minutes before Tony arrived with the would-be killer. Hyland says himself that his cab was just a few blocks away, close enough to hear the shooting, which he thought was a backfiring truck. How did Tony Ferri know that, Jake, if he wasn't driving the cab with Hyland in it?"

"Where did Hyland go in the cab?" Jake asked after a moment.

"Monmouth Garage on West Fifty-seventh. He was to meet Mrs. Hardesty and Joan there where they'd left Joan's car, and drive home."

"Suppose this rotten shot is from Huck's, too," Jake said. "Maybe drove down from Huck's in another car. He knows that the Hardestys and Hyland use the Monmouth Garage, so he puts his car there, too, or in one next door . . ."

"Why should he take a chance like that?" the Captain asked.

"Look, mister. Whoever potted at Tubby knew Tubby was in the bar, and five will get you ten he knew Hyland was meeting Tubby there, too.

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So he wants to keep track of Hyland and the Hardesty women. So he picks a garage where he can keep track of their car. Is that sense?"

"Good sense," Maclain said. "Carry on!"

"So Hyland leaves the bar and climbs into a cab in front of the hotel. Now where's Tony Ferri and our would-be killer?"

"In Tony's cab parked close by," the Captain said. "Maybe just around the corner. Tony or his passenger probably took the number of Hyland's cab just to be sure."

"Your eyes are as good as mine, mister. Rotten shot does his rotten shooting. He hotfoots it back into Tony's cab, and Tony steps on it for the same place that Hyland's cab is headed for. Are you with me?"

"Yes," said Maclain. "So far."

"Both cabs land at the Monmouth Garage almost at the same time. Hyland gets out of his, and target-misser gets out of Tony's. Then what?"

"What?" asked Maclain.

"I'll tell you what. Tony either follows the other cab or locates the driver through the number. Maybe he knows him, or maybe he doesn't. Tony slips the other driver a five spot and says, 'Did you and your fare hear any shooting down around Third Street?' The other hacker says yes or no, or we heard backfires. Tony says, 'Are you reporting it?' and the hacker says yes or no. Either way, Tony says, 'Well, you keep your mouth shut and I'll report it. I need a little stand-in with the Traffic Bureau,' and the hacker says for five bucks he wouldn't report the dropping of an A-bomb. Would you like a glass of buttermilk, mister? I'm ordering some."

"Yes, I would," said Maclain. "Just how long were you on the force, Jake? Only a damn good cop could figure out that one so quickly."

"Thirty years," Jake said, "before I opened this joint. That's where I first met Tubby. I retired on a chief inspector's rating."

"Well, it was Larry Davis who got me into this thing," the Captain told him.

"I know who got you in, and who you are," Jake said, "or we'd never have got this far."

"You can take me a little farther," Maclain said with a grin. "What gave you the idea that this rotten shot might have come from Huck's?"

"It's been my experience," Jake said, "that where a killer is hanging around a place, oddly enough that's usually where the most bodies are. I've been stewing on this, mister, more than you know."

"Where did you meet Matt Snowden?"

"Never laid eyes on him," Jake declared positively. "We've had correspondence — generally through Tubby. That's all."

The page boy brought up the buttermilk and Jake gave a glass to Maclain.

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The man went out after pausing to pat Schnucke.

Jake took a swallow, wiped his mouth on the back of his hand, and said, "I used to pass on things I heard, but now I'm in politics and running a bar. Let me shoot a few questions at you?"

The Captain put down his empty glass and said, "Shoot!"

"Has anybody found out where Lola Severn, Tubby's wife, is?"

"Not that I know of. The B.C.I. is trying to trace her."

"Well, she went to jail under the name of Lola Easton. You can pass that on. She's a blackmailer, a badger artist, a hophead, a jewel thief, a gang moll, and a killer — or was. She'd be about fifty and probably still not too bad-looking if any of her looks hung on. If there was anything screwy about Tubby's death, she's the dame who could work it out in her twisted brain. How do you know she's not living at Huck's, married to somebody else?"

"I don't," said Maclain.

"Okay," Jake said. "Go to Mantini's Restaurant in Peekskill. It's on the first street parallel to the main drag toward the river. I don't know the name of the street. Go in and order Italian coffee, but don't go with that black chauffeur and Cadillac car. When your coffee comes, ask for Rosa. She was nurse to a quack that got sent up the river by Judge Rafferty. She's Tony Ferri's gal. She may talk, because you're blind and because I'm going to phone Mantini — if you can sell her that you're leveling."

"Leveling how?" the Captain asked.

"That you don't think Tony killed all those people any more than I do," Jake said. "You damn sure wouldn't want to be talking to him if you did."

"What do you think she can tell me?"

"Where Lola is, maybe," Jake said dryly, "and where to find Tony for sure. The only description anybody seems to have of him is that he's Italian." Jake paused. "Personally, I think he's hiding out in Peekskill."

The Captain stood up. "Is there anything you'd like to add, Jake?"

"They threw me out of school," Jake said, "because I couldn't ever figure how two plus two was four."

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

INSPECTOR LARRY DAVIS' OFFICE in Centre Street was furnished with one swivel chair, a fumed-oak desk that was heel-marked and had lost most of its fume, a cuspidor raided many years before from a house of questionable reputation, eight or nine straight chairs in various states of disrepair, and a

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picture of F.D.R. badly desecrated by a coterie of houseflies. A battalion of the assiduous flies — apparently of Republican leanings — were deployed in battle formation in the sunshine of the east wall.

A patrolman cautiously stuck his head in the door and waited until the Inspector looked up from a copy of *The Chief* he was reading.

"There's a blind man with a dog, Inspector. He says you'll . . ."

"I will," Davis said.

"But, Inspector. Sergeant . . ."

"He's new, too, son," Davis said. "Never try to stop this character when he tries to see me. He has two dogs and you never know for sure which one is which one. We had a nice new proby ten years ago and this dog was the other one and the proby tried to keep him out by pulling a gun."

"But, Inspector . . ."

"The dog came in with the proby's hand in his mouth, son." Davis sighed. "It was rather startling. The hand was holding the proby's gun."

"You mean I'm to let him in, sir?"

"That," said Davis wearily, "is the general idea, son. His name is Duncan Maclain. He's here for nothing but to cause me trouble and give me heartburn. Show him in, laddie boy."

"But, Inspector. Sergeant . . ."

Davis' heavy eyebrows came together with a click that snapped the new patrolman's head out of the office door.

A moment later Schnucke's nose preceded the Captain into the office. The Captain slammed the door behind him, narrowly missing the puzzled face that was peering in over his shoulder.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Commissioner," said Duncan Maclain. "I was looking for Inspector Davis. I had some information . . ."

"Sit down, clown," Davis said. "The sergeant's new and the patrolman's newer and eager."

"They're bright, too." The Captain found a chair and moved it close to the desk. "I might say brilliant."

"Yes," said Davis. "Like the sun. The pay's so high compared to the work today we can take our pick of anyone. I'm sorry they wouldn't let you in."

"They wanted to see my mendicant's permit." Maclain sat down. "By God, Larry, if I thought those cretins knew what a mendicant was . . ."

"They do," Davis said with his rare grin. "It's your clothes, Captain. Only the beggars who knock off a hundred and fifty a day can afford those togs when they're off duty. If you just strapped one leg up and bought an accordion — cripes!" He sobered suddenly, his sharp eyes on the Captain's face. "What the hell's eating you?"

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"Voices and mannerisms, footsteps and handshakes, hair tonic and drinking habits," said Duncan Maclain. "Do you know Jake Patman?"

"Twenty-five years." Davis took a toothpick from a box in his desk drawer and carefully broke it into three little pieces.

"When I grow too old to dream, I'll have you to dismember," the Captain sang softly. "Someday, Larry, I'll write a monograph on the interpretation of various manifestations of the subconscious through the medium of the lowly toothpick. What's the matter with ex-Chief Inspector Patman that you should have an uncontrollable desire to break him in two?"

"In three." The Inspector carefully disposed of the pieces in the cuspidor. "Did I say anything about him? We worked together for years, but on different sides of the street. I own a four-room house in Queens and I'm close to retirement. Right now I'm worried about getting a new suit for next winter. When I retire, I won't have the dough to buy a saloon. What got you interested in Jake Patman?"

"The late Myron Severn was his partner in the Merry-Go-Round." The Captain went on to give him all the details of what had happened at Huck's, including his interview with Matt and Weisman the night before.

Davis noisily scratched his head. "Why do you think Snowden hired you, or tried to?"

"To build a fire under Tony Ferri," the Captain said promptly. "I think Snowden knows damn well where this elusive hack driver is — but I think Ferri has something on him. I think Snowden's afraid that Ferri is going to get tired of lying under wraps and wondering how soon the Department will catch up on this tag that's out for him. My part in the picture is to play blind patsy and toss a sufficient scare into Tony so that he'll blow — not his mouth but to some remote place where he won't be in danger of being picked up for questioning any minute."

"Could be," Davis said after a moment's thought. "That wasn't entirely what brought you here. What else?"

"Get the Chicago police to have Harold Yates, Ted's father, call me at my office in a couple of hours. Right now I want you to drive up with me to Severn's room and give it a quick once over."

"It's been gone over. I can get a search list and read it to you."

"No good, Larry. As I told you once when I found that hidden drawer that smelled of violets in Paul Gerente's desk — I'm looking for something that does not meet the eye."

"Just what?"

"That's a completely impossible question for me to answer," said Duncan Maclain. "There's a very close tie-up between my present nonpaying client and Tubby Severn. It's worrying hell out of me."

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"I thought Matt told you last night that he gave Severn most of his information."

The Captain didn't seem to be listening. "The only way I can satisfy myself as to just how close that tie-up is," he went on in the same abstracted tone, "is to have a look at that Broadway Palace apartment and see exactly what isn't there."

The Inspector rose and shrugged his shoulders.

Twenty minutes later, Cappo dropped them in front of the Broadway Palace Hotel.

The same pleasant clerk was in back of the desk when Davis and the Captain stopped and asked for the key to 320.

"You're Mr. Severn's friend who was here last Wednesday, aren't you?" he asked the Captain.

"Yes." Maclain smiled. "You have a very pleasant voice, young man, and you were very courteous to me. I remember you quite well. I'm Duncan Maclain."

"I'm Ivan Murray, sir. We were all so shocked to read about Mr. Severn. He was one of our nicest guests. I can't understand . . ."

"This is Inspector Davis from Headquarters," the Captain said. "It's in connection with Mr. Severn's death that we're here right now. Maybe you can help us."

"If there's anything —"

"How long has he lived here?"

"I can tell you exactly from our guest list." The clerk reached for a drawer underneath the desk. "Mr. Severn came here more than five years ago. He's always had suite three-twenty."

"About Wednesday afternoon," Maclain said. "You told me Mr. Severn was out, but when I went upstairs I found he was asleep on his bed."

"He went in and out at all sorts of odd hours," Murray said: "Sometimes he was — er —"

"Loaded?" Maclain suggested.

"Well, yes, sir. I was surprised when he failed to answer his phone when you asked for him."

"Did he have many visitors?" the Captain asked.

"No, sir," Murray said promptly. "Not very many. A few times he'd have some friend in who was slightly — er —"

"Loaded," Maclain supplied.

"Yes, sir. A couple of times when he was away he gave someone his key."

"Women?"

"No, sir. Outside of a little too much to drink now and again, he was a very desirable guest. I hope Mr. Yates . . ."

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"He's fine," the Captain said. "Has anyone called for Mr. Severn's effects?"

"No, sir. No one yet."

"If anyone does, or asks for Mr. Severn, please get in touch with me or Inspector Davis." The Captain gave the health farm number.

"Yes, sir. Immediately."

They went upstairs, and for forty-five minutes the Inspector patiently followed the Captain around reading labels on bottles left in the bathroom; bottles left on the portable bar; suits, summer and winter; overcoats hung in the closet, and shirts and underwear in bureau drawers.

The Captain finally flung himself in a chair and said, "Give me a shot of that rotgut on the bar."

The Inspector poured. "I hope you've found what you weren't looking for."

"I'm nuts, Larry." The Captain took his drink in a single gulp and made a face. "For a two-fisted drinker with an estate of a hundred thousand, Tubby certainly stocked a lousy bar. He must have done all his drinking at Jake's."

"And gotten his mail there, too." The Inspector was searching the desk again. "There's not an old letter here even."

"He had an office in the Merry-Go-Round," the Captain said.

"We've covered it, chum." Davis poured himself a shot, downed it and made a face, too. "What now?"

"Are there two little Japanese boxes on the mantel? They're shaped like houses."

"Yes, but they don't look like boxes to me."

"They're not supposed to look like boxes." The Captain stretched out his hand. "Give me the one on the right. I found the cartridges in the other. I might as well have a last look-see."

It took him a moment to open the little drawer. "Feels like these are visiting cards in here, Larry. They're bent slightly from being shoved in, so I didn't hear them rattle. What do they say?" He passed the box to Davis.

The Inspector was silent for a moment as he picked out fifteen business cards that were tightly wedged in the little drawer.

"They're all the same." The Inspector read:

Joseph Dale
22 East 17th St.
New York City
Licensed investigator. Divorces discreetly handled. Information on anything promptly obtained. Al. 9-4777

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The Captain didn't say anything.

"Just off the cuff," the Inspector remarked, "it would seem that some of Mr. Severn's idle hours away from his night club might have been passed while he was posing as a private eye."

The Captain picked up the house phone at his elbow and asked for Algonquin 9-4777. A moment later a phone bell rang sharply in the bedroom.

"If you happen to want to talk to me, Larry, you can take it in there on that private phone beside the bed," said Duncan Maclain.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE ONLY SIXTH SENSE ever granted to anyone so unfortunate as to lose the vital power of sight was a sense called common sense. Captain Duncan Maclain often thought that he was very lucky to have had a more than average share of practical intelligence during the first twenty-some years of his life when he had two good eyes.

He would readily admit that he hadn't known exactly how to use, develop and apply that gift of practical intelligence as effectively while he had his sight as during his long years of blindness.

Ratiocination was badly dulled by outward appearances, prejudices, and the civilized claptrap of fashions and social position. Sight injected many pieces of visual sleight-of-hand into the art of cold unbiased reasoning.

Who stole the mistress' jewels?

It must have been the colored maid, my dear! Why, just to look at her face —!

It couldn't have been the mistress herself, to get the insurance. Anyone who saw that Yvette model she had on last night could tell she never needed money.

Who cut up little Johnny, aged ten, and stuffed him in the furnace?

Just take a look at that janitor! Sure, I know he had half his face blown away in the war. It isn't that. Don't you think I know a sex maniac when I see one? And try to pronounce his name, or even spell it. What do you expect, letting all them dirty furriners in?

What did you say? They've arrested that fourteen-year-old boy who lives in the next apartment? Well, that's the damned police for you. Why, that kid's top of his class in school, looks like an angel, and the cleanest and politest boy I ever knew. They're nuts! He's not guilty. He's a little gentleman!

The Captain sat at his desk in the familiar environs of his own office, an hour after leaving Davis, and let his mind run free.

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He went to the Capehart and put on Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*, turned it low, and returned to the desk again to listen, subconsciously, to Toscanini's inspired conducting of the N.B.C. Symphony Orchestra.

Sarah Marsh came in after a little while with thin sliced bread and butter and a pot of tea. She looked at Maclain, and with the experience of years of service back of her, decided it wasn't a good moment to speak to him.

She put the tray on the desk in front of him and went out silently.

I simply couldn't believe my eyes!

The phrase kept running through the Captain's agile mind, threading itself into the music, disturbing his normal tranquillity.

Had he been blind so long that he was falling into a trap of the sighted? Was he letting his senses, keyed to a world of darkness, be swayed into a nonfunctioning state by sympathy?

I simply couldn't believe my eyes!

The girl was so beautiful.

The man was so nice-looking.

The boy was so young.

The grandfather's hair was so white and he was so feeble.

Killers.

The Captain poured, added sugar and lemon and thoughtfully sipped his tea.

Who shot Frenchy Scanlon?

"*Do you think it was Tony, Jake?*"

"*If the General had fifty cents on him — Tony killed him for his money.*"

Who else could have? Certainly not that fine upstanding young officer who was blinded in Korea. How could he do such a thing? Why, even if Frenchy got his girl into trouble and the boy found it out, he certainly wouldn't shoot the General. After all, he's blind!

And you certainly don't think for a moment that he'd kill an old judge who'd found out from an abortionist that the brave young blind boy had stolen money from the girl's father to pay the abortionist! And you certainly don't believe that the brave young hero would kill the girl's father! And a close friend who had found out he was malingering and had a good eye left!

Was Duncan Maclain finally blinded by blindness?

None are so blind as those who will not see!

The Captain pushed the tray away and reached for the telephone. He flicked a switch that recorded both ends of a phone conversation for his permanent file. It took him about five minutes to get a doctor friend who was chief ophthalmologist at the Manhattan Eye Hospital, and a few seconds more to make himself known.

"Is there enough variation in plastic eyes between the right and the left

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that I should be able to distinguish one from the other by feeling them?" the Captain asked.

"A great many blind people have to," the doctor said in a dry tone. "There is quite a variation in the nasal end of plastic eyes."

"Do you think, in an average case, that I could tell if a man was carrying around two eyes for the same socket?"

"I wouldn't put it past you," the doctor said. "Lots of people with one eye carry a spare."

"One thing more," Maclain said. "If a man lost one eye in an explosion, might he lose the sight of the other for a while and then get some of it back again?"

"Quite probably," the doctor said. "Also he might lose the sight of the other for a while and then get some of it back again."

"Would it be difficult to detect, if the man wanted to malinger?"

"Don't quote me," the doctor said, "but the answer is yes."

The Captain thanked him and then got the superintendent of the building at 22 E. 17th Street on the phone.

"Do you have a tenant named Joseph Dale, a private detective?"

"He's in the phone book. Fourteenth floor." He gave the number of the room.

"This is Duncan Maclain," the Captain explained. "I'm a private operator, myself, although I'm blind. I was wondering if you could tell me what Dale looks like. He was recommended to me for a job I have."

"Big guy," the superintendent said. "Light hair. Six foot. Blue eyes. Pleasant. He's been with us a long time, but we don't see him much. The cleaner says he isn't in much. He pays his rent by mail in cash. Nothing wrong, is there?"

"I hope not," said Maclain, "but I'm a little worried about him. He was supposed to get in touch with me."

"I wouldn't worry," the man advised him. "Sometimes he doesn't show here for a year."

"Thanks." The Captain hung up and leaned back in his chair.

Ten minutes later Mr. Harold Yates of Evanston, Illinois, called on the long distance phone.

Mr. Yates had practically retired from active business and spent most of his time at home.

Mr. Yates was upset about Myron Severn's death, and probably more upset at the request of the Chicago police that he phone Maclain. He was grateful to Captain Maclain for his interest in Ted.

No, outside of a tiny bit of light perception in his one remaining eye, Ted had been totally blind since the Army sent him home. The Army

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doctors didn't think he had a chance of seeing again. He was drawing full pension through the Veterans Administration.

Yes, Mr. Yates had just had word of Myron Severn's legacy. Captain Maclain knew, of course, that it would all go to Ted anyway. Didn't Captain Maclain think that under the circumstances — that is, considering the difficulties that Ted's mother had been in — that it was much better to have kept it from Ted that the Yateses had adopted him when he was three years old?

Certainly Myron had never wanted Ted to know that the Yateses were his foster parents, and that Ted was really Myron and Lola Severn's son.

Mr. and Mrs. Yates hoped that Ted would marry Joan Hardesty. They didn't believe a word of the rumors Ted had heard about her and General Scanlon.

They didn't believe it any more than Myron had believed it. Myron had believed in General Scanlon anyhow — he'd been so good to Ted, promoted him right along — and when Scanlon had unearthed all those graft scandals while he was with the Inspector General's office — well, Myron had even dug him up information about Matt Snowden through Myron's restaurant connections with the packing companies and wholesale food supply houses.

"Do you recall what those scandals were about, Mr. Yates?" the Captain finally broke in. "Myron Severn was murdered. General Scanlon was murdered. Could both those murders have stemmed from one and the same thing?"

"Why, I scarcely think so." Mr. Yates's garrulity suddenly evaporated. "It's been some time since Scanlon was shot, after all. I hope you can persuade Ted, if he marries, to bring his wife home. We appreciate your calling, Captain Maclain."

"It's been nice to talk to you, Mr. Yates," said Duncan Maclain.

The Captain took a fifty-piece jigsaw puzzle from a drawer in the desk and dumped the pieces out before him in a pile. His sentient fingers had sorted three and hooked them neatly together when he reached again for the phone and put in a call for a colonel in the Pentagon Building in Washington.

"Maclain," he said briefly when the officer answered. "Spud and I are working on Severn's murder up here and it involves Scanlon. Have you any ideas, Louis?"

"I'm full of them, Dunc," the Colonel said cautiously. "But you'll have to name the ones you want."

"This one," said Maclain. "Could Scanlon have unearthed anything for the Inspector General's office that might have involved gangsters or gamblers up in this vicinity?"

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"Not only could have — *did*," the Colonel said. "Scanlon turned up a nice one where the boys were chiseling in on manufacturers awarded hush-hush army contracts for supplies to Korea."

"Any names?"

"I can let one slip," the Colonel said, "but only because he's under investigation now."

"For gambling?" the Captain asked softly.

"If you know, Dunc," the Colonel said, "that's so much the better, because I didn't tell you."

"It wouldn't be Matt Snowden, would it?" the Captain said.

"It would," said the Colonel. "Remember, I didn't tell you."

"You didn't, Louis," the Captain agreed. "I just guessed it this afternoon and I simply can't believe my ears."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THE SATURDAY EVENING TRAFFIC on the Taconic Parkway was heavy. The Captain closed his sightless eyes and leaned his head back against the cushions listening to the hissing brush of tires on the steady stream of automobiles rolling northward from the week-end heat of the city.

Time collapsed into a long dark unit when you lived in a world of blackness and sound. Only events that affected your life were of real importance. They marked the hours, days, and years, wrapping themselves up in neat bundles that contained a beginning, a middle and an end. The contents might represent the passage of a day, a week, a month, or a year, but it was the happening that was of importance and not where it occurred or when.

You rode for a while in something that moved. It might be boring, or even scary. It didn't much matter where you were going. The destination might offer more comfort in warmth or coolness, but your problems of travel, once you alighted, were always much the same. The view was the same up in the mountains or down by the sea. What difference was there in the time of arrival, day or night? You were always certain there wouldn't be any glorious sunrise or sunset to see.

So you concentrated on events, past and future. What happened the last time I came this way? What will happen when I arrive where I'm going?

And people. They were invariably a part of the events. What happened to so-and-so when we were here the last time? What happened to them after they left me? What happened to me?

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Schnucke stirred against his feet.

Now, this particular bundle of events that ended four lives with violence really started for Tubby and Ted on that railroad train where Scanlon was shot. When Tubby walked into my office — that was Wednesday morning, as though it made any difference — it really started for me.

It's obvious where it finished for Frenchy, but where did it really begin for him? Was it when he first approached Tubby Severn about food scandals in the Army?

That might be.

Isn't it possible that Tubby could have shot Scanlon for something Scanlon knew about him, and taken the gun to protect his own son from suspicion?

Well, what's new about that theory? Except that, as you usually do, you've gone around in a jet-black circle and met again with your very first idea.

The Captain moved his feet uneasily and Schnucke resented it. She rose in dignified German shepherd silence, turned around three times and settled herself in a new position with her chin resting on the Captain's left shoe.

It brought back the drive up with Tubby and Ted in the rain.

"*Found out I got the telegram and tried to shoot me. Wrote to the old home town. . . . Got the telegram here. That's a joke. Neither of you can see it.*"

"*We could hear it if you read it.*"

"*See, trying to trap me.*"

"*Neither of you can see it.*" *See* it? You didn't talk about *seeing* a telegram. You talked about *reading* one. "*We could hear it if you read it.*"

And Snowden had talked about a publicity photo of Laura Dale, shot while she was boarding the train. Hundreds of publicity photos were shot of movie starlets. Where would one be most likely to run? In her home town paper, naturally.

Headlines: LAURA DALE INJURED IN WRECK OF FLYER.

Picture caption: Laura Dale, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. etc., etc., etc., as she boarded the etc., etc. Copyright by the Ocean City *Daily Telegram.*

With a capital *T.* Wrote to the old home town. Not Laura Dale's. No. *The* old home town. *His* old home town, too.

"Well, damn my thick blind skull!" said Duncan Maclain. "Cappo, stop at the next filling station on the parkway. I want to put in a long distance call to Ocean City, New Jersey."

A counter of groceries, salami, and cheese occupied one side of Mantini's. On the other side, the left coming in, were half a dozen booths with narrow wooden seats and marble-topped tables.

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It was after nine, and the restaurant was deserted except for Benito Mantini, a gnarled old man with a leathery face and sparse white hair who was hidden in back of an Italian newspaper behind the grocery counter.

He raised a pair of watery eyes for one brief look when Schnucke and the Captain came in, then returned to his paper.

The Captain stood for a few seconds, drinking in the aromatic odor of spicy sausage, keen cheeses, and an overtone of black coffee and lingering smell of lasagna that came from the rear.

He turned left without any apparent hesitation and ordered Schnucke forward. When he was seated in the last of the booths with Schnucke settled beside him, Mantini shuffled out from behind the counter.

The Captain heard the pulling down of window shades and the closing and locking of a door. The drag of elderly tired feet came closer and stopped beside the table.

"Italian coffee, please," the Captain said.

The feet moved away.

A swinging door gave an unmistakable creak and slowly fanned the overheated air.

The Captain lit a cigarette and found a heavy china matchholder and ashtray on the table near the wall. Overhead, a radio blared up quickly and was as suddenly turned down.

The swinging door was opened again. The footsteps shuffled back. A metal coffeepot and a small cup and saucer were set on the table before him.

"The coffee must have time to drip," Mantini said. "You are blind, no, signore?"

"Yes," Maclain said. "Quite blind."

"Too bad, signore. You wish something more?"

"I'd like to talk to Rosa."

The footsteps moved away. The Captain's alerted hearing followed them, this time to another door and up a flight of uncarpeted stairs.

The drip of the coffee in the metal pot decreased and was silent. The Captain filled the little cup and added sugar and a twist of lemon peel that was on the saucer.

A door closed at the rear of the building. Somewhere nearby a starter ground noisily and a motor came to life in an ancient car.

Light footsteps came down the stairs. A door opened and closed. A woman using some delicate perfume sat down opposite him at the table.

"Grandfather said you asked for me." Her English was flawless, her voice nicely modulated. "I'm Rosa. Are you a policeman?"

The Captain sipped his coffee and said, "No. I've been employed by Mrs. Hardesty to find out the truth about two murders at the health farm.

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The police think Tony Ferri committed them both, and more. I don't. Jake Patman . . ."

"He phoned," Rosa said shortly. "I'm Tony's wife. He has never killed anyone." The Captain heard her breathing grow sharper. "What do you want to know?"

"Did Tony ever steal a thousand dollars from the safe at Huck's and pay for an illegal operation with it — to a Dr. Husenby?"

"No."

"Can you prove it, Rosa?"

"I could if Judge Rafferty was alive. Now I don't know."

"Maybe I can help, if you want to tell me about it."

"Why shouldn't I?" she said after a moment. "I was working for Husenby. Some man got a girl into trouble."

"A very well-known girl, wasn't she?" The Captain snuffed his cigarette in the china ashtray and wondered if he had gone a step too far.

There was a long pause and Rosa's breathing had quickened when she finally said, "Yes. Very well-known."

There was another wait and the Captain had grown conscious of the intentness of her scrutiny when she asked, "Were you sent here by Jake Patman to trick me? To try to find where Tony has gone?"

"No. I've told you why I am here, Rosa. If I can clear up these murders, then Tony's in the clear. You told me yourself he had never killed anyone."

"How did you know this girl was well-known?"

"Her name was mentioned to me by Myron Severn who was killed at Huck's Wednesday night. I figured out it might be the same girl while I was driving up here this afternoon."

"What girl?" Rosa asked abruptly.

"Laura Dale, the young movie actress. She died a couple of years ago. I wish you'd trust me enough, Rosa, to give me the name of the man who got her into trouble."

"I wouldn't need to give you his name if I knew it," Rosa said bitterly. "I'd kill him with my own hands, as he's killed so many others."

"Doesn't Tony know?"

"Sometimes I wonder," she said. "If he does, he's always been afraid to tell me. Laura Dale came to Husenby's for an operation while I was working there. The man who got her into trouble and sent her there has something big on Tony; what, I don't know. Tony paid Husenby a thousand dollars before the operation. He said the man had given it to him to pay Husenby, and I believe it. Laura Dale was big-time. Tony was a sergeant in the Army."

She stopped, and the Captain sensed that she was looking at dreams that had faded far away.

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"You were speaking about the money, Rosa," Maclain reminded her gently.

"It was marked," she said in a low, fierce voice. "The man who claimed it was stolen from Huck's took it himself, then gave it to Tony to pay Husenby. My God, don't you see how perfect it was? If Tony opened his mouth, the man just says, 'Sure, it's my money. Ferri came over from West Point and pinched it from Huck's safe.' "

"Whom have you told this to, Rosa?"

"I told it to Judge Rafferty one morning. Drove up to Huck's myself. He said he was going to tell Huck and that he thought the man who had lost the money was a guest there then. Judge Rafferty died that noon, and Huck that night."

"Why haven't you told this to the police, Rosa?"

"Because I'm frightened." Her tone was so low the Captain had to bend across the table to hear her. "The police would never believe me or Tony. They'd just arrest him and try him for the Judge's murder and for Huck's and everything else they could hang on him. Why do you think he drove his cab for that guy last Tuesday night?"

The Captain lit another cigarette and waited.

"I'll tell you why," she went on. "He was scared not to. That's why. This mug who has Tony back of the eight ball is a killer. He knows all of Tony's record, and Tony's old man's record which is quite a bit to know. Then he got Tony tied up tighter with this planted thousand."

She sighed.

"How do you know this man's a killer, Rosa? I've been told by several people that Tony was a killer, too."

"Look," Rosa said patiently. "Tony's never been anything but a two-bit larceny son of a big shot, Fink Ferri, and since he married me he's been straight. I know, because hacking means hocking your shirt to eat good, and I know what we've been through. . . . Grandpa says you're blind, mister."

The Captain nodded.

"If you could see this killer I'm talking about, he still wouldn't be familiar to you. He's got a little system that Tony calls brand new. Most of these old-time mobsters hire their killings done. This one doesn't. He does his own and hires goons to take his place so he can prove he's some place else except at any killing. He's got nineteen names, and probably more stooges. Drop this thing, mister, before you open a closet door up at Huck's and Smart Boy pops you. He may be your own brother if you have one."

"I'm afraid I'll have to take a chance," the Captain said. "Maybe if you told me where Tony is and let me talk to him —"

Rosa stood up. "If I knew where he was, I wouldn't have told you any-

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thing, mister. He left me this afternoon until he thinks it's safe to send for me. He's getting money from this man tonight some place, and he's blowing the town and maybe the country."

"I hope he isn't blowing his brains out, Rosa," said Duncan Maclain.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE TACK ROOM at the end of the stalls in the deserted stables was stifling hot, and chokingly close with accumulated dust and the smell of old moldy leather.

There had been a light on in the farmhouse when Tony passed it on foot, keeping to the grassy edge of the road for the sake of quiet. He had left his car outside of the grounds. He was certain that Doc Buchanan or his wife hadn't seen or heard him, even if they were home.

Once inside the stable he risked the beam of his pocket flashlight. There were holes in the rotted floor that made traps where you could break a leg. The narrow beam took him safely past the fifteen pungent stalls.

The door to the tack room was of heavy wood, but the last one in hadn't even bothered to put the wooden peg back in the hasp and staple, and the door hung slightly ajar.

It creaked alarmingly when he opened it just wide enough to sidle in. The flashlight showed a wooden bench, a bottomless rocker, a couple of quirts hung on nails, and two fungus-green sidesaddles set astride beams protruding from the wall.

Tony sat on the bench and cupped the tiny electric glow against his wrist watch.

Nine-fifty.

In ten more minutes he'd be through, rid of every rotten contact that had plagued him since the day he was born.

The old bastard had finally outsmarted himself — forcing him into driving the cab last Tuesday. He was smart enough to realize it, too. He knew that Tony had him now. He'd pay to keep murder quiet. Anybody would.

You couldn't buck the Mafia, or the Syndicate, or the Unione-Siciliano. When the cops couldn't buck them, nor the Treasury Department, nor the public, nor the F.B.I., what the hell was one lone dumb bastard with a gangster father and a gun-moll mother going to do?

Tony Ferri against the world!

He lit a cigarette and cupped it in his hand, army style.

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The big boys never let you quit once you were in on the things he knew. You could never love anybody, never have a wife and kids, never hold down an honest job, never get a good night's sleep.

"*We need a good driver for this caper, Tony. You're the best there is. You wouldn't want anything to happen to Rosa, would you?*"

Nothing was going to happen to Rosa. He'd damn well find out before he took the dough why that blind man had been sent to talk to her.

There was something dirty back of everything. He'd learned that long ago. Angles. Everything was full of angles.

God, it was a pity that both he and Yates weren't killed in that train. That might have been yesterday. He began to wonder if they really had any idea at all as to how much he knew.

With the dough behind them they could take over anything. Hadn't they tried it with the movies, too? Extortion. Blackmail. Threats. Seduction, or just plain rape. Start 'em on reefers and next on the kick and the bigger they are the harder they fall!

What about that sweet kid, Laura Dale? Holy Mother, you wouldn't think they could get her, too. Drive her so desperate she blats to that general, so he's gunned on the train while good old Tony covers for Yates.

And why was he always covering for Yates? Goddammit, Ted's father wasn't any better than Fink, but Teddy had a brewery to adopt him and a big-shot adopted papa to get him into the Point — and a big-shot crook for his real papa to push him along in back of the scenes and present him with a barrel of dough!

Yeah, if there was one thing Severn was careful about, it was the welfare of his precious son!

The door to the tack room creaked slightly.

Tony mashed out the butt of his cigarette in the thick dust on the floor.

A powerful torch shone full in his eyes, then went out to double the blackness. Hands went over his brown sport jacket and shirt and down his slacks and a voice said, "Stand up!" He stood while the hands patted both his hip pockets.

"You'd better look at the bench," Tony said. "I might have laid a knife down there."

"I wouldn't put it past you." The torch went on and swept the bench, then clicked off into black nothingness again.

"Where's the old man, Sam?" Tony asked.

"He's damn well not up here. You're nuts, with all these state police around, to ask for a payoff here."

"Am I?" Tony chuckled, but it wasn't funny. "There still may not be enough around to suit me. I want my dough and I want to get out of here.

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I didn't figure this would be a safe place to shoot me and the ceiling's awful low to get hanged in here. If I don't call Rosa by half-past ten — she's got names left with her in an envelope. One of them's yours, Sam, among them that might be meeting me here."

"Here's your money, Tony."

Tony took the Manila envelope and put it in his pocket. "How much?"

"Four thousand — now. More when we hear where you are. Where are you going?"

Tony said, "Away from here. Why was that blind man, Maclain, tipped off where to find Rosa?"

"We thought it might be nice to let you know we could find her any time," Sam said. "Also I felt better having somebody know that you were being paid off tonight and leaving. Matt wanted me to get safely out of here. Matt hired him, Tony."

"Really?" Tony inquired in his soft sarcastic voice. "The last thing I heard about this Maclain was that he was consulted by Tubby Severn. I wouldn't want Matt to be hanged, Sam. I love him. He's promised to take care of me."

"He loves you just as much, Tony," Sam said. "Now, sit right here for five minutes more while I get out in safety."

Alice Buchanan came in from the porch of the farmhouse and looked at the clock. It was twenty minutes past ten.

She went into the doctor's office and said, "Arthur?"

Dr. Buchanan looked up at her through a cloud of pipe smoke.

"What now, my dear?" The doctor put a medical journal down tent-fashion over one knee.

"I'm worried about that police dog of Captain Maclain's. He's come out of the dog house and is standing up by the fence in the pen. I went out to look because I heard him growling again."

"I guess he's restless," the doctor said. "He'll be all right when Cappo gets back. The Captain said they'd be here tonight sure."

"I think I'll phone Mary and see if the state police are still around."

"The state police won't quiet the dog, Alice. What's his name?"

"Dreist. He may have seen something, Arthur. Suppose some of those hobos are sleeping out there? They may be drunk and smoking in the barn or stable again."

"The state police have gone, I'm sure, Alice. I saw their car pass two hours ago as we came in. The dog will be all right. At least he's not barking and he can't get out of the pen."

"I'm going to call Mary, or Jim Hyland, anyhow. Mr. Savage is there

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and he can handle the dog as well as Captain Maclain."

"For heaven's sake, dear!" The doctor tossed his magazine to the floor and started to rise. "I'll go over and look in the stables myself. Mr. Savage will be in bed and everyone else."

"And get yourself killed? You'll do no such thing, Arthur Buchanan! I'm phoning the house." Alice pushed him firmly back in the chair.

Ted Yates had been in bed for an hour, but sleep wouldn't come.

His mind was full of marriage — the trip with Joan to the courthouse to get a license — the blood test taken by Dr. Buchanan.

It seemed like weeks, not days, since the blood test was sent in. Undoubtedly the report would be plus-four or something equally horrible. If it was okay it would be lost in the mail and never come.

He was rich! Fifty thousand dollars! He could buy a house, a Cadillac like Captain Maclain's. He could write all day, and exactly what he wanted to write. Give him five years and he would be still richer — even famous.

If he wanted to, he could have a chauffeur. If he could just find one as good as Cappo.

He had to have a smoke or he'd be awake all night. But he'd promised Joan and Swanny that he wouldn't risk fire in the old frame house by smoking in his room.

Well, he could always go outside and have one in Joan's car. He knew exactly where it was parked at the end of the line.

He got out of bed and slipped on slacks, a shirt and slippers.

His braille watch told him ten-past ten. There wasn't a sound as he went downstairs, but he was surprised to find the top up on Joan's car. He was thinking about rain as he opened the door and climbed inside. A moment later, he was thinking of nothing.

When the convertible started, he was lolling sideways against the side, totally unconscious from the powerful uppercut that had caught him squarely on the jaw.

A figure was running desperately down the road when Spud Savage opened the gate of the pen and said, "Get him, Dreist!"

The broad-chested shepherd had gone before he spoke, propelled down the road like a rocket out of a gun.

Spud shot the beam of his electric torch after the flying man and dog. The running man never had a chance. Dreist threw himself sideways at the back of his knees in a tackle any referee would have called a foul for clipping.

The man and dog went down together, and just as they fell, Spud jumped

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for his life to avoid the bumper of the speeding car that had turned on lights ten feet behind him.

The car hit man and dog together, but Dreist with animal instinct and muscles of spring steel had leaped six feet from the hurtling death and was safely out of the way.

Dr. Buchanan and Spud together reached the shapeless still figure of the man.

The doctor knelt down beside him. Spud held the light, but he had to turn his head away.

"Whoever he is," Spud heard the doctor say, "he's dead."

Spud replied dazedly, "The Captain was looking for Tony Ferri. We've probably found him but I don't think Dunc thought he would be knocked off by anyone driving Joan Hardesty's car."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

IT WAS FIVE MINUTES past midnight.

Ferguson, Rivers, Spud, and Jim Hyland were seated around in the game room staring moodily at Duncan Maclain. The Captain, alone at a chess table, was busily playing against himself a variation of the Evans Gambit.

The Inspector heavily cleared his throat. "What's your opinion, Maclain?"

"Yates can't see." The Captain moved a pawn to knight's fourth to attack the black king's bishop.

"He was in the car when we found it, seemingly abandoned, outside the grounds," Ferguson said.

"And out like an exit," Spud put in. "Dunc had me check Ted pretty thoroughly about a book that Anne Hardesty was reading to him — Ellery Queen's *Dutch Shoe Mystery*. Ted remembered the last word Anne had read was 'Murder?' and Anne verified it. But somebody had left the book on Ted's bed, and turned his light on after he was asleep. The same person had turned down the corner of page forty-four."

"Proving what?" the Inspector asked morosely.

"That you're obsessed with the idea that Ted can see out of one eye," Maclain told him.

"Okay. Yates is blind. You're blind. We're all blind." Ferguson produced a large handkerchief and vigorously blew his nose. "You're so hellish smart,

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Maclain — who hit Yates and drove the car?"

"I can tell you who didn't, Inspector." The Captain made another move. "I phoned Inspector Davis five minutes after I got here — about ten to eleven. He knows Snowden and Weisman. He went to Matt's apartment on Central Park West and checked on them personally. They'd been playing poker there all evening and asked him to sit in. He didn't. What about Rosa?"

"It's her husband all right, and she admits he's Tony Ferri — but beyond that, no soap!" Ferguson started to cellwalk on the fireplace rug. "She don't know nothin' from nothin' — or she's not spilling it to Sergeant Lucey. The same goes for old Mantini."

Lieutenant Rivers disposed of his fifteenth cigarette and cautiously said, "Have you told the Captain about Severn's wife, Inspector?"

Jim Hyland pushed his horn-rimmed glasses farther up on his eagle nose and added, "And about the money found on Ferri?"

"Nobody tells me anything," Maclain said.

"They never get a chance. Lola Severn, ex-convict from Bedford, died last year in Denver. Tony's mother. Yates's mother. Tubby's wife. Positive identification. One bad egg in a million that prison cured. No mistaken identity." The Inspector never missed a step from his regular pacing. "We're just as certain that she was Lola Severn as we are that Tubby was Myron Severn." He stopped his walk with a quick right turn. "Get that, Maclain?"

The Captain gave him a wistful smile. "Did I say anything?"

"No, that's the trouble," Ferguson said. "You never say anything. You just intimate. Do we know that this guy who was hanged was Tubby Severn, the half-owner of the Merry-Go-Round, the one you say is father of this blind boy who was adoped by the Yates family?"

"Well, *do* you?" Maclain doubled his concentration on the chessmen.

"Yes, we do," Ferguson said stonily. "We have a habit of fingerprinting corpses, whether you know it or not. The man who was hanged here was Myron Severn. We have a complete set of fingerprints and also a picture. You see, Captain, he had a pistol license and was carrying a gun."

"It's nice to have that settled," the Captain said. He turned from the table long enough to beam his congratulations. "I was told he got the pistol when he was on some food mission in Korea. He was a versatile chap, Inspector. What about the money?"

Hyland said, "They found four thousand bucks on Tony. It was in much the same kind of envelope as the money I told you about that Snowden claimed was stolen from the safe."

"There are millions of envelopes that look the same," the Captain said.

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"I wonder, Jim, if you'd answer a couple of questions. This mess seems to get more tangled up as we go along. Do you mind, Inspector?"

"Hell, no!" Ferguson sat down. "Rivers and I started running out of questions three days ago."

Maclain swung around in his chair. "You'd never met Tubby before Tuesday night when you went to New York?"

"Never."

"Did you open a window by the table in the Broadway Palace bar?"

"No. It was jammed open and I couldn't shut it. What's all this leading to?"

"Monday, I may know," the Captain said. "I'm expecting a paper — the Ocean City *Telegram*. It has a picture in it that I hope will tell if Tubby was lying to me, or to you."

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE CAPTAIN PICKED the black king from the chess table and held it up in the air, staring at it as though he might by sheer concentration penetrate the darkness.

"There are, I believe," he said, "more than sixteen billion possible moves in an average chess game — some say thirty-two billion. They all tend toward one end — to kill the opponent's king. The familiar word 'Checkmate' comes from the Arabic *shāh māt* and literally means 'the king is dead.' "

"What are you confusing the issue with now?" Ferguson asked.

"With its own confusion," the Captain said. "The Gross formula for solving a murder gives seven prime factors that have to be answered in solving any crime: Who? What? Where? How? When? Why? By whom? I've been trying to apply those seven prime factors to simplify the chess game."

Rivers asked, "What makes you think this is a chess game, Captain Maclain? And who's the opponent of the law?"

"The killing of Tony Ferri tonight makes me think it's a chess game." The Captain replaced the black king on the chess table and folded his hands against the edge like a boy in school. "But there's only one player. He's playing both black and white. He's knocking off a lot of minor pieces who haven't asked to get in the game. He wins if either side checkmates the other side's king. Let me briefly apply the Gross formula to the murders

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of Scanlon, Rafferty, Huck, and Tubby Severn. Then let me apply it to Tony, and I think you'll see what I mean."

The Captain picked five pawns from the board and moved his chair to a polished table that dominated the center of the room. The others gathered around him.

"Scanlon's first," he said, and separated one pawn from the others. "What, where, when? Murdered on a train, March, 1950. Why, how, and by whom? He had obtained knowledge of a scandal. If it involved graft in army supplies, then it involved four men — Matt Snowden, Sam Weisman, Tubby Severn, and Tony Ferri. Maybe five, if we included Ted Yates."

"Where the hell did you dig that dirt?" Ferguson wanted to know.

"Pipeline to the Pentagon, Inspector," Spud said. "I was a major in G-two and Dunc worked for them during the war."

"If the scandal concerned a woman, all those men might have been involved and the woman in the nurse's cape, too. So the 'by whom?' has to include them all." The Captain pushed the pawn to one side and said, "So much for Scanlon."

"Fine," said Ferguson. "You've narrowed him down to five men and a woman. Two of the men are dead and another is blind. The woman might be anyone."

"Who lives at Huck's," said Duncan Maclain, "and who has the use of a nurse's cape. That's true. Now let's apply Mr. Gross and his formula to Rafferty and Huck, as we'll call these pawns here. Murdered at Huck's on the same day in April about a month after Scanlon was killed. Why, how, and by whom? Because Rafferty obtained knowledge concerning a woman who died at the hands of an abortionist in Kingston — and that knowledge involved someone here at Huck's, both in the abortion and probably in Scanlon's killing, too. Rafferty passed it on to Huck and Huck hot-headedly confronted this person — who poisoned Rafferty and hanged Huck."

"How?" asked Ferguson grimly.

"I'm coming to that a little later," the Captain said.

"It's later than you think," said Ferguson. "Go on, chess champ — *who* murdered these two?"

"Someone here at Huck's," said Maclain. "And the probabilities dictate that the same person must have been on the train."

"Sam Weisman was here," Jim Hyland said.

"But Tubby wasn't, and Tony Ferri wasn't, and Matt Snowden wasn't, and Ted wasn't." The Captain pushed the two pawns close together. "And Weisman, so far as we know, wasn't on the train."

"How do you know that Snowden was?" Ferguson asked.

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"I don't," said Maclain, "and I don't know that Tubby was — except that Ted saw him at the wreck and he undoubtedly took Ted's gun from the train. Do you see where that leaves us?"

"Yes," said Ferguson, "out in the women's ward again."

"It's supposed to." The Captain pushed the two pawns aside. "Rafferty and Huck, we are supposed to think now, were murdered by a mysterious cloaked figure of a woman seen on the train. Some woman who might have shot at Tubby and knocked down Ted in New York last Tuesday. Roster includes Mrs. Hardesty, who might be Tubby's ex-convict wife but isn't, and Mrs. Dunne, the housekeeper, and Mrs. Buchanan, who might be the same but aren't — thereby leaving Anne and Joan."

Jim Hyland said stiffly, "That's perfectly insane."

"Most chess masters are slightly insane." The Captain picked up the fourth pawn. "That's what makes me think we're up against a good one. Let's examine Tubby — murdered at Huck's last Wednesday night. Why? Had knowledge, to be proved by a picture, of who was here at Huck's when he was supposed to be somewhere else, and of who was on the train. Verdict — hanged. By whom? Someone in picture — who in order to have hanged him must have been here that night, known he was coming up with me — and who must have also been on train."

"Why did he have to know Tubby was coming?" Rivers asked.

"Preparations," the Captain said. "Huck wasn't killed on the spur of the moment. A try was made for him in the morning. It got Rafferty, but missed Huck. So Tubby was hanged the same way — after a try that missed the night before. If it hadn't stormed . . . Well, it did. So Tubby was slated for suicide, otherwise he'd have been killed some other way."

"And what, if you don't mind revealing it to a couple of dumb cops, is this way?" the Inspector asked coldly.

"It's a hanging machine." The Captain smoothed his clipped mustache. "It's because some of the details are vague in my mind that I've hesitated to say. I know it's noisy, hence both hangings during a storm. Two pieces of rope, a long and a short. A pulley from the barn that was used to haul up hay.

"The long rope's tied to a two-hundred-pound weight that's been set on the balcony railing. Then it's run through the pulley that's been tied to the steampipe. Then it's tied to the shorter rope that does the hanging. The weight's pushed off and drops six or eight feet, instantly breaking the victim's neck. The victim is then hauled up by the neck — and counter-weighted as he is, he could be lifted by a woman with one hand. The ropes are stopped from hauling him too far by a triple knot in the short one. I showed you where it was flattened against the pulley the other day."

"You didn't tell me this stuff," the Inspector said. "This is hellish!"

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"I didn't know it then, and still have no proof," Maclain explained. "My mind simply tells me it had to be this way. Two feet of loose rope above the triple knot on the short piece are tied around the pipe. Then the pulley, the long piece and the weight are all cut away. The victim drops a few inches and your hanging rope shows nothing in the Goddefroy test of fibers except that he jumped down."

The game room was silent for a moment. Spud moved on the couch and Ferguson twisted uneasily in a squeaky chair. "What kind of a weight?" he asked Maclain.

"A sandbag was my first idea, but frankly I'm guessing because I don't know. Even Swanny couldn't carry two hundred pounds upstairs unless he brought it a little at a time. To fill a sandbag that size would take hours. Traces would be left all over the balcony and rain wouldn't help much to wash them away. Then after the bag was dropped, it would have to be carted away."

"Tell me something," Ferguson said. "When this weight drops, it wouldn't hit the ground, would it?"

"No. Enough space would be left to haul the corpse up to the pipe before the weight reached the ground."

"Well, when its fall was checked, wouldn't it swing in under the balcony and smash against the house with an awful slam?"

"That's why number seven was used," the Captain told him. "The balcony is over a double garage that's seldom used because of getting in and out on the hillside. The garage doors were opened — even in that storm. When the weight swung in under the balcony it went in the garage instead of knocking half the house down."

"That," said Ferguson, "is something I would like to see — or would I?"

"I don't think you ever will," the Captain said. "With Tony's death I hope the killing is over."

"What gives you that idea?"

"The 'why' of his murder." The Captain picked up the last of the pawns. "The 'why' and the 'when' both. Tony was in on this all, Inspector. While stationed at the Point, he paid money stolen from Snowden to Dr. Husenby in Kingston. He was on the train and alibied Ted. He was decently working and married until he was forced into driving that cab he owns on his night off last Tuesday. He then came forward and alibied Jim Hyland, hoping it would cover him, even though he was driving the murder cab. Answer me this, Inspector. Why was he knocked off suddenly tonight, after being allowed to live so long?"

"I thought you were telling me?" Ferguson set his jaw and stared at the pawn. "He probably knew too much about these killings."

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"Ah, there we have it!" said Duncan Maclain. "That's my point. Why was he allowed to live when he'd known too much about these killings right along? Why was he killed tonight? Because he'd discovered something since Tubby's death — something that was entirely new."

"What?" asked Ferguson.

"That there never was but a single king in this game of chess — and that he's not the king who was mated. That's the knowledge that killed Tony," said Duncan Maclain.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

TWENTY MINUTES AFTER Maclain was in bed a car came in.

He heard it as soon as it entered the grounds, sorting its powerful hum out of the noise of sleeping men in the rooms all around him.

Saturday night.

A week end in the country at Huck's.

"Let's take a look at the place where Severn was killed!"

Who's afraid?

"I'd like to get out of the city, myself. This heat is killing me."

"They won't take you for less than two weeks."

"That's what you think. Huck's dead. They'll take you for two hours — if you pay enough."

Only twenty-five rooms in condition for guests. Mary had told him. The rest were out of order — plumbing or painting, or needing new furniture.

The house must be almost capacity-full.

The car had stopped under the porte-cochere.

Ferguson and Rivers back again maybe?

What for?

No. It was more guests checking in. They'd put their luggage in the downstairs hall and parked the car.

What made people think there was any advantage in having ears so keen?

"Grandmother, what makes your ears so big?"

"The better to hear you with, my dear!"

"Where did Robinson Crusoe go with Friday on Saturday night?"

Jim must have put them in Alcohol Alley. They certainly didn't come past here.

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Sluf-sluf! Sluf-sluf! Slippers coming down the hall.

Tap-tap-tap with a fingernail! Mustn't wake the sleeping guests at $25 per sleep.

"Captain Maclain." The whisper sounded louder than a shout. Something sinister about a whisper, particularly when you're tired and losing your precious *sang-froid*. Psst! Maclain! What makes your ears so keen?

The Captain swung his long pajama-clad legs to the floor, switched on the light and said, "Come in, Jim."

Hyland came in and closed the door. "Snowden and Weisman are back again. Checked out this morning and back tonight. I told them about Tony."

"So?" The Captain stretched his arms and yawned.

"Snowden would like to talk to you. He's in number eight at the end of Alcohol Alley. Weisman's in six, the room next door."

"Drunk?" The Captain was suddenly wide-awake.

Jim said, "My God, no. They've had a few in a poker game. They wanted those two rooms because they're quiet. This part of the house is pretty full."

The Captain said, "Oh," and got up and put on his slippers and black silk dressing gown. "Tell Matt to come along."

"If you don't mind," Jim said in a low voice, "it might be better if you went there. The guests —" He waved an arm in a fruitless gesture. "That is, there's no one else in any of the rooms in the Alley."

"I don't wonder," the Captain said. "Last on the left — right across from the gas chamber, isn't it?"

"I'll go with you. Your dog isn't here, I see."

"I don't need her around the house — nor you, thanks just the same. Go to bed, Jim, and get some sleep. If you start trying to lead me every place I'll take you down to the dog pen with Schnucke and Dreist and check you with Cappo."

Hyland watched him with troubled eyes as he walked off with long swift strides, guiding himself by the rubber strip of matting that cushioned the length of the polished hall.

When he turned into Alcohol Alley the Captain felt that Swanny would not be pleased at the return of these guests that blatantly showed contempt and scorn for all his treasured training rules — dinner and wine at the Jug and Grouse and now the corridor was already redolent of smoke from a fine cigar.

When the Captain went in, Matt was unpacking and Sam was perched on the edge of the bed. Sam got up, closed the door, and guided Maclain to the one easy chair.

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"Bourbon?" Sam asked.

"I think I will, since you got me up." The Captain picked a heavy pair of silver-backed military brushes from the desk beside him and fingered them idly. "Frankly, gentlemen, I've had one hell of a day." He was finding the brushes confusing. Did Matt have the room, or Sam?

Sam said, "Here's your drink and a water chaser."

"Thanks." The Captain put the brushes down and took the tumblers.

Sam said, "Here's to chaos, the lawyer's friend!"

The Captain drank, then sat quite still for an instant, waiting for the sounds of other glasses to be set down. He gave an imperceptible shrug when he heard none.

Matt said, "Why was Inspector Davis tipped off to check on us in New York tonight? I had reasons for not wanting the D.A. or the department to know that Sam and I were back in town."

"It struck me it might be better if the police did know," the Captain said. "I'm supposed to use my judgment for a client. After all, I was more or less unofficially retained by you, as I recall."

"Retained for nothing, because you said you'd use discretion," Weisman said. "So we're back here. Good health, good food, quiet, and no cops sitting in on your poker games."

"It seemed discreet to have the department give you both an alibi, Sam. They're getting a little leery of them since the late Tony Ferri started handing them out. It will be a bit tough for them to question an alibi certified by their own inspector." The Captain found a package of cigarettes on the desk, shook one out and took a light from Sam.

Matt said, "He's right, Sam. We were sick of Tony for more reasons than one. This gambling caper's going to be a tough nut for the D.A. now. I wonder who did us the favor."

"Maybe I did," said Duncan Maclain. "You sent me to Jake. Jake sent me to Rosa, after letting her know by phone to expect me. Rosa passed the fact of my coming on to Tony."

"So what?" said Matt.

"So this," said Maclain. "There are a lot of things I don't understand. Four thousand of them are dollars found on Tony's body tonight."

"Getaway money," Matt said.

"It didn't get him very far. About a hundred yards down the road." The Captain took a last long drag on his cigarette, put it out, and exhaled slowly. "I'm blind and a little soft in the head, Matt. The state police are neither. I'm afraid they're going to get ideas."

"I'd be interested to hear them," Sam said.

"We're living in an extraordinary era," the Captain began. "The gangs

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we started during prohibition no longer exist as gangs. They've become big business, the biggest in the country. They've been able to do this because the public laughs at the idea of the mastermind criminal, just as it laughs at the idea of spies. Both are for the movies and the birds."

"If you think that gambling —" Matt began.

"Chicken feed!" The Captain snapped his fingers derisively. "What's a billion a year? An outlet to lose profits in."

"Profits from what?"

"Narcotics. Prostitution. Night clubs. Extortion. Abortion. Illegal distilling without Federal taxes to pay. Income tax frauds. So what do we find? That our illegal profits have become so large that the gangs have been forced into every legitimate investment in the country — hotel and restaurant chains, theater owning, filling stations, radio and TV — with tentacles that stretch from California to Washington, and from Italy to America, and with dummy corporations so intricate they can't be traced down." The Captain gave a weary sigh and pressed his eyes. "The boys have turned respectable, except for one thing."

"What?" Sam asked.

"Murder," said Duncan Maclain. "The only way they know how to fire an employee or to rid themselves of a business rival is to kill him. They have no recourse to the law. The only way they can escape a legal jam is by getting into a worse one — murder."

"What the hell are you getting at?" Matt wanted to know.

"I'm getting at the astonishing mind of Myron Severn," said Maclain. "My partner and I, with the help of the New York police and the state B.C.I., have dug up an astonishing amount of information on him in a single day. He's been a gangster since he was born, and his right-hand man was Tony's father, Fink Ferri. We've also learned a lot of things about the only girl he ever cared for — Laura Dale."

"And where did all this snooping get you?" Matt poured a drink and the Captain heard the bottle rattle against the tumbler.

"It got me mad at you, Matt," the Captain said. "Mad at anyone who had any connection with Severn, except possibly Jake Patman, who I think is a little dumb. You can deal me out from my nonpaying job as of now, Matt. You and Maclain are mad at each other."

"Tell him the truth, Matt," Weisman said. "It will be better if you've spilled the works to somebody in case we get shot into a side pocket in front of the grand jury."

"Tell him, yourself, Sam, if that's your advice. You're the mouthpiece I pay."

"Tubby was a man of many interests," Sam said. "Too damn many for a

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simple one-track bookie like Matt and a buck-chasing second-story lawyer like me. In addition to his interest in the Merry-Go-Round, thereby getting a speaking tube into the lower cellars of the police department, he owned a small slice, about ninety per cent, of Doc Husenby's sterilized and very high-class abortion factory. Believe me, Captain, just having a pipeline into Husenby's case sheets could make a man a potful of moolah."

A match struck and the Captain had a whiff of new cigar.

"You have to be careful when you're a juggler," Sam said. "Very careful, or you'll drop a ball. There's an old saying in law — the man who tries to be his own lawyer has a fool for a client! Tubby got along okay, Captain, so long as he stuck to caring for just two things — making money in any way, and that Yates boy who's up here with you. That's his son."

Sam paused and the Captain nodded. Matt opened the door, looked out in the hall, closed the door and sat down.

"He'd kept away from dames," Sam said. "It killed him when he fell in love with one. He was married, see, to a dame in prison. A guy who was on Tubby's payroll — name of Joe Dale, wasn't it, Matt?"

"Yeah," Snowden said, "and his daughter's name was Laura. She got her start singing in the Merry-Go-Round and went up fast from there to the movies."

"Do you happen to know what Joe Dale was doing on Tubby Severn's payroll?" the Captain asked.

"Stand-in," Sam said. "He was a busted-down private eye who happened to look a lot like Tubby. Whenever Tubby wanted to be some place else, he sent Joe Dale there and Dale used Tubby's name. It made for a nice perpetual alibi."

The Captain didn't say anything and Sam continued, "The trouble came when Tubby got Dale's daughter into a mess and sent her to Husenby's shebang in Kingston. She died — and he went nuts. He started really hitting it hard — talking to this kid's picture in his room.

"You see, Captain, he always had to cover. Let the name of Myron Severn get tied up with anything not quite kosher and Tubby's wobbly empire was fini, busted, done and through.

"He made Tony Ferri cover for him about Laura Dale. Tony was stationed across the river in the Army. Matt was here. Tubby called Tony one night and told him to get some money quick and rush it to Kingston to Husenby, but he said he'd kill Tony if he blabbed where it came from."

Sam leaned forward and tapped on the desk with his finger. "The damn fool, Tony, came over here and pinched the money from the safe, Captain Maclain — Matt's marked thousand."

"It was you who suggested telling him the truth, Sam." Matt's voice had

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an edge the Captain hadn't noticed before.

"I thought I did," Weisman said without any heat.

"Well, I don't swallow it," Matt said. "I don't believe Tony Ferri ever touched that marked dough. I think Tubby took my dough. It was easier for him to get up here than for Tony to get over from the Point. He passed on the grand to Tony to cover himself up, in case anything came out about Laura Dale and Husenby. Somebody's always been the goat on any of Tubby's operations, legal or illegal — you, me, or Tony. There were plenty ready to do Tubby's dirty work, and he had the money to pay — like that job on Tony tonight. I think Tubby paid for Tony's killing before Tubby was knocked off. The lug just carried out his orders."

"Turning over four thousand to Tony to be left on his body," the Captain said. "Such loyalty astounds me."

"Tubby has a long arm, even dead," Matt said.

"And that's why all this dirt was spread around by Ferri, I suppose," the Captain said. "It's involved the Hardesty girls and Scanlon."

"Tony's life wasn't worth a nickel if the truth were ever to leak out about Laura Dale," Matt Snowden said. "He knew what had happened to Scanlon, Rafferty, Huck, and Joe Dale, Laura's father. Tubby was a killer-diller, Captain. Here's a man who was glad to see him go."

The Captain slowly moistened his lips and asked, "What about Joe Dale?"

"Joe Dale?" Sam said. "He's vanished off the face of the earth, but I wouldn't bother looking if I were you unless you've got a diver's suit and like walking on the bottom of a river."

"If Joe Dale is gone," the Captain said, "who do we blame for Tubby's demise — now that we no longer have Tony Ferri?"

"Laura Dale had a brother," Matt said. "His name was Dick — last heard about he was on the road. He's a cokie. I'm keeping all my fingers crossed and all my toes that he's miles from here. I think this Dick Dale would be slightly teed off about his pa and sister — even if he was the type to land in St. Francis' Shelter."

The Captain went over it all in bed, then lay wide-awake for two hours more while he scrubbed his nerves with a pair of silver-backed hair brushes. He couldn't make up his mind if they belonged to Matt or Sam.

Why in the name of common sense had Snowden asked for No. 8? It was the only other room at Huck's at the back end of the house with a balcony, and underneath the balcony the other half of the double garage where the doors were usually open.

It didn't make sense in the Captain's world of sound and order that Matt could want to be reminded every minute of the hanging of Tubby Severn.

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Every bit of Sam's story sounded true, and it all made sense.

The Captain gave out a tiny prayer that Sunday night would be clear and warmer. He wanted that picture from Ocean City before Huck's went through another storm.

CHAPTER THIRTY

SUNDAY WENT BY clear and bright with the Hudson shining and the hot sun kissing cadets on parade, and brightening the time-browned buildings of West Point.

The Captain walked and showered and had a massage, and ate and talked to Ted about war and marriage and weather.

He couldn't see the sun, or the sparkling river, or the cadets on parade, or the time-browned buildings of the Point.

Back of Ted's laughter, he sensed the steel that kept the heartbreak of darkness from drawing up the mouth of a sightless face into a perpetual snarl. Back of Ted's gaiety, he descried guts, and the hatred of violence and killing and the idiocy of war that kept any blinded man alive with the tiny hope that someday the world would see exactly what it had done and stop it all.

Hopeless, he knew. But maybe someday the boy would write, leave one little jot or tittle that would give an excuse for the conditions that had produced Myron and Lola Severn, and the misery each had brought to the world, and the prison that had housed Lola, and the death bred in death that had destroyed Tubby and reached out arms of ignorance to blank the blue eyes of Ted himself.

Hopeless, he knew.

And Ferguson came, and Rivers came, and the Captain told them Weisman's story.

The Inspector said, "Oh, Jesus Christ!" with no intent to blaspheme, but with a sacred intent to call on a power higher than his own for another job he had to do.

Then Monday came and the Captain waited.

Cappo returned from Philipstown without any mail.

Duncan Maclain talked by phone to Davis. The New York police and the nation's police moved into ponderous irresistible action. The tag was out for Richard Dale — color white, home, Ocean City, N. J., age between twenty and thirty, wanted for murder. Occupation — vagrant. Addictions

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— cocaine and heroin. Further details unknown.

The B.C.I. moved in on Huck's and eight very promising employees left to find a new life farther away and free of questions. The B.C.I. moved in on the Shelter. Farther Garvey lost his temper, and a hundred poor devils between twenty and thirty decided, along with Duncan Maclain, that Monday was always a disconcerting day.

Tuesday came after a sleepless night to many people, and a picture clipped from the Ocean City *Telegram* arrived in the mail in Philipstown. Along with it came the information that Laura Dale had never had a brother to the knowledge of that staid New Jersey town.

The Captain locked himself in a room and showed it to Spud.

Spud studied the picture and studied still closer the haggard face of his oldest friend, Capt. Duncan Maclain.

"Close-up of Laura Dale with teeth and the late Frenchy Scanlon," Spud said sadly. "I've seen both their pictures before. Background of eager public watching, fourteen people badly blurred and unidentifiable because they couldn't be recognized. Possibly recognizable — Tony Ferri in sergeant's garb of U. S. Army. Three men, who might or might not be together. One is bookmaker, name of Matt Snowden. Second is lawyer, name of Sam Weisman. Third is question mark, might be Myron Severn, hanged up here."

"It can't be Severn," the Captain said.

"Since I've never seen him personally, I wouldn't know," Spud told him. "Other figure is good side view of dame in nurse's cloak and hood. Profile might be Joan or Anne Hardesty. They look very much alike. Flashlight caught her stepping into vestibule of car M-one-four-four. End of reel."

Ferguson and Rivers arrived at two in answer to the Captain's phone call.

They looked at the photo first with the naked eye.

"The other guy's Tubby," the Inspector said.

"For sure," agreed Lieutenant Rivers.

Spud brought a heavy lens from the library and they looked through that.

"Tubby," said Rivers. "Unmistakable now."

"You're damned tootin' it's him," the Inspector agreed. "And the cloaked dame getting on the train is Anne Hardesty. Why don't we ask her if it isn't Severn?"

The Captain had slumped down into a chair, his face chalk white.

"What's the matter, Dunc?" Spud asked quickly.

"When you get where you can't believe your ears against people's eyes, you're really blind and it's time to quit. Reading in order from left to right, what three follow Tubby in the picture?"

"Tony Ferri, Weisman, and Snowden," Rivers told him.

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"Where's Ted in the picture?"

"He's not."

The Captain forlornly scratched his clipped mustache with a well-kept thumbnail. "There's apparently nobody left alive who knows the truth," he blurted out to the world at large, "except a couple of lugs right under my nose, and the more I see of them the less I can figure who they are."

Anne looked curiously at the picture and said, "That's Mr. Severn without a doubt. At least, I'm sure it was the man I saw at the train, and the one who was killed up here."

"You must have been there, yourself," Jim Hyland said.

"I'm the one wearing Alice Buchanan's cape. She brought it down to New York in the car with her. I had a wait and got freezing cold, so I slipped it on over the coat I was wearing."

"Where were you going?" Jim asked without a show of too much interest.

"I wasn't going anywhere," Anne said. "I stepped on board to say goodby to Frenchy. You can take it any way you want to, Jim. Frenchy was very fond of me. I met him in New York several times for dinner and dancing. Two or three times Joan went with me." Her red lips set in defiance. "That was before we became engaged, Jim. Everybody here, except Huck, thought he might eventually marry me."

"And why not Huck?" Jim asked.

"Because all his life he resented any man who paid any attention to Joan or me. Joan and I have covered for each other ever since we were old enough to make sheep's eyes at a boy. We learned the hard way to keep our mouths shut. We never denied any stories, and we look so much alike that people were constantly confusing Joan and me. I was supposed to have been running around with Ted. Joan was said to have been seen running around with Frenchy. It was tough for any woman to have Huck love her. Ask Mary."

"I don't need to ask anyone," Jim said. "You'll never find it tough, I hope, Anne, to be loved by me."

"Bless you, my children," said Duncan Maclain. "You've been a great trial to Ferguson and me."

Weather is a most important factor in the lives of those who cannot see. Duncan Maclain always carried with him a braille thermometer and barometer. He rose every day and retired every night in the same black world without sun or moon, or clouds, or stars. Should he dress for a day that promised rain or keep himself down to the lightest clothing? Should he open the windows wide in his room or keep them open just a crack

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against the freeze that was due before dawn? Should he take a raincoat or a sunshade? Should he move his clothes from the chair by the window where rain would soak them or could he leave them there in safety?

The answers were in his fingertips and the delicate needles of his thermometer and barometer. He could keep his life and himself in order only by consulting them both religiously.

On Friday, nine days after Ted's forced trip to Bellevue had flushed the Captain out of his happy home-life routine by catching him in his office, his barometer fell sharply.

The double wedding of Ted and Jim and the Hardesty girls was scheduled for the following day.

Sybella Maclain and Rena Savage, fretting over their absent husbands on Spud's Long Island farm, had made wifely threats by phone, but on invitation to the weddings, romance had won. Both of them were driving to Philipstown Saturday morning, under condition that Spud and the Captain drive back home with them after the reception.

Snowden and Weisman, who had paid in advance for two weeks more the previous Saturday, were also invited. Snowden had promised that presents ordered from New York were already on the way.

At six o'clock on Friday evening, just as the guests sat down to their broiled fish dinner, a giant cloud of inky black moved in stately fashion up the Hudson and wiped out all of the setting sun except for one lurid blood-red streak.

Swanny and Spud watched the Captain pick at his food, and both of them showed disapproval.

At seven o'clock the TV set was emitting hideous electric crackles and erratically jumping illegible pictures until the watching guests were all on edge.

Spud left quietly, went upstairs, and found the Captain already in his room. He was lying on his bed with both hands clasped behind his neck.

Spud said shortly, "Maybe we'd better haul out tonight, Dunc. You're ruining a couple of weddings."

"I'm trying to save one," the Captain said. "If this bunch of slaughter is what it looks like — and one Dick Dale really exists and is out for revenge — the next one on the list to be fingered might be Ted Yates. An eye for an eye. He's Tubby's son." He pointed to the barometer.

Spud took a look and said, "It's very low."

"That makes two of us," the Captain said. "I want to give Joan and Ted a life of security. I don't think there is any Dick Dale, Spud, or ever has been. The chances are I'll die before I can prove it, but it's one of those things I simply have to know."

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CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

THERE WERE FEW PEOPLE living who knew any better the hell on earth that a blind man faced than Duncan Maclain. He understood a blinded veteran because he was one himself, although the war that had blinded him in 1917 had become as remote as the Civil War or the Spanish War, or the Franco-Prussian.

He sometimes thought he was very lucky that he had once been able to see. Yet, tabulating all his friends and the few that he really loved — Sybella, Spud, Rena, Davis, Cappo and Sarah Marsh; and Schnucke, his eyes, and Dreist, his lifeguard — he realized that Spud was the only one he had ever seen.

He still pictured Spud as the crazy young boy in a lieutenant's uniform with Sam Browne belt, whose main idea of winning a war was to find the nearest wet canteen.

The rest were all pictures pieced together from myriad impressions of his four remaining senses and stamped with that effect-etched plate of memory on a brain abnormally keen.

In thirty-five years he had made few slips. He had to know his friends from his foes, and recognize them instantly, not by figuring out who was who but simply because he was positive of his own trained powers. There was seldom a chance to make a second mistake in the business the Captain was in.

No more dangerous antagonist ever lived than Duncan Maclain. He wasn't any superman. He was still more dangerous, because he recognized himself as a handicapped human being. He hated machine guns and men who used them. He couldn't stomach dizzy blondes.

To be beaten in a game of death simply meant to die, and playing with death was his game. So a hundred times the normal effort had been spent by Maclain in training his ears, his fingers, his taste, and his nostrils, not merely to replace the sight he had lost in France, but to make himself stronger for the loss of it.

With the training had come an uncanny card-file memory, and a set of muscles throughout his body that moved him with the accuracy and speed of a stalking panther. Added was the inflexible will and self-descipline that had brought it all to fruition, but that would never make him a complacent success ready at last to let down.

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He hated deceit, for the unscrupulous often pick the blind for easy prey. More than anything else on earth he hated killers and the greed that produced them.

So he avoided violence as long as he could and sometimes too long for his own sure safety. He knew, and Spud knew, and a few who had died and could not tell, that once the spark of anger struck in Duncan Maclain he ceased for a time to be a human being and turned into an implacable and almost infallible machine. More deadly than any Tommy gun was the quickness of the Captain's mind.

Tonight his anger was against himself.

He was filled with pity for a blind boy he had grown to like. The pity should have been for himself, for emotion somehow had dulled his senses and stultified the working of his brain.

He had crouched by his bed for an hour in the dark cell of his bedroom and listened to the wind that howled outside. It had ripped up the Hudson hours before, but still hadn't brought any rain.

A jigsaw puzzle of two hundred and fifty small pieces lay spread on the floor beside him. He had taken it from the game room when he came upstairs after dinner.

He could assemble one of fifty larger segments normally in an hour, and for years such a task had helped him to think by giving him confidence in the sensitive recognition of curves that fit by feel of his fingers.

The puzzle on the floor beside him had proved to be sheer frustration. No two pieces could he find to put together.

They were too many and too small.

Like the pieces of Tubby's murder — or was it Tubby's murders?

Scanlon — Rafferty — Hardesty — Severn — Tony Ferri and Joe Dale. And indirectly, Laura Dale, whose death might well be the cause of all the others.

Too many to assimilate. A killer that was like some volcanic eruption in Japan — or six dying in a plane crash. Or fifty-six.

Or the order might be different since he was playing with names —

Scanlon — Rafferty — Hardesty — Dale!

Four up for Tubby!

Severn and Tony Ferri. Chalk up two for cokehead Dicky Dale, revenging sister and father.

Or was Dicky Dale just another phony name?

There certainly was a Joe Dale. Or had been. Private investigator — 22 E. 17th Street.

Why would Tubby hide those cards in his room? Fifteen — why not just one? If he wanted to keep Joe Dale in mind . . . Why, Dale was on his

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payroll! If sometime he wanted to pose as Dale and wanted a couple of extra cards, why not get old Joe on the phone?

Sure, that was it! Tubby could call Joe anytime — and get himself on the phone in the other room.

Tubby Severn smoked cigars. He had lit one, and a good one, when he was in the office, the first time the Captain had met him.

The Captain knelt by his bed again. His fingers swept like the legs of agile spiders over the pieces of jigsaw puzzle. It all went together some way, and once together it made a picture.

He suddenly paused with a piece in each hand. He finally had two that fit. Snugly. Cleanly. His mobile face showed triumph as he joined them and laid them gently on the floor.

Now the pattern had changed, but he had a larger outline to work with —

Tubby Severn smoked cigars, and kept pipes and tobacco in his desk drawers in his rooms.

A third piece pleased the Captain's fingers. He tried it almost ecstatically. It nestled close and neatly into the other two.

Tubby Severn drank Bourbon. Straight, if it was good, he had said. There were nothing but second-grade bottles of blended rye whiskey on the poorly stocked bar of Tubby's sitting room in the Broadway Palace Hotel.

More surface to work with. The Captain's brain was operating now in trance-like coordination with his fingers.

He located pieces four and five, but the picture forming in his mind had nothing to do with the picture forming on the floor.

Tubby Severn used an expensive shaving lotion and hair tonic. He had brought up only the cheapest to Huck's, and there wasn't a trace of the expensive brands in his New York bathroom. Tubby wore the finest clothes — and had good but inexpensive ready-mades in his closet.

The jigsaw puzzle was growing, forming a definite outline, but a missing piece left a hole in the center. The Captain put all his mind to work to find it. Now that the hole revealed the shape, it proved easier than the others. His fingers patted it into place with a quiet air of triumph.

He and Davis had been very stupid. Tubby Severn had employed Joe Dale, as Weisman said, but Tubby Severn certainly never had Joe Dale's telephone in Tubby Severn's room.

The man who lived in 320 at the Broadway Palace was Joseph Dale, Laura Dale's father! It was Joe Dale who had talked in drunken grief to his dead daughter's picture.

Then why did the desk clerk think he was Severn? Why had he thought so for five long years?

"Obvious," the Captain whispered. "Dale was hired by Severn because

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he looked like Severn — to furnish a *perpetual* alibi while living at the Broadway Palace posing as Severn."

What about Ted? Did Ted know?

The Captain touched his braille watch. Ten-forty-five.

The wind was loud, the rain not far away.

He went to Ted's room and woke him.

"Is it possible that the man we drove up here might not be Tubby Severn?"

"My God!" Ted said. "There were times —"

"What?"

"When he first came to see me at Hines. I thought it was my blindness. His voice seemed different somehow. There were times at the hotel . . . But I thought it was on account of his drinking. Who was the man?"

"Joe Dale, a private investigator. And if you think you were duped, you have nothing on me. I heard the voice of the real Tubby Severn and Joe Dale on the same day. I thought it was his drinking, too, and let it go completely out of my mind because I felt sure that if there was any discrepancy you would have noticed it."

"Then this Joe Dale was the one who was shot at in the bar — the one who was — ?"

"Hanged up here," the Captain supplied. "But I don't know yet if the killer thought he was getting Dale or Severn."

"Where's Tubby now?"

"I hope to find out," said Duncan Maclain, "before there's any more killing. You'll help me most by going to sleep."

"But the money Tubby left me?"

"I think you'll get it without a doubt," said Duncan Maclain. "Good night."

He went back into his bedroom and knelt by the puzzle again.

Fingerprints? They never lied. Ferguson had taken the hanged man's prints. The New York police identified them as the prints of Myron Severn.

The Captain shuffled pieces around. His face and forehead were lined with concentration.

Did the New York police know Myron Severn?

No, not the real one.

Another piece had fitted. He put it down.

Joe Dale had taken out a pistol permit and given the name of Myron Severn. So, of course, his body had been identified as that of Severn. It was as simple as that, once the proper-shaped piece was found.

Who killed Joe Dale? Answer — Tubby Severn.

Why? Because Dale was after him to revenge the death of Dale's daugh-

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ter, Laura. Weisman's story was true. Dale had Tubby on the run. How?

The pieces were fitting much faster now.

Dale had Tubby marked — the real Tubby — in the Ocean City newspaper. That was "Myron" that Dale had written down, and not "my son."

But the arrow was pointing to Tony. On the blotter, yes. But suppose that Dale had written Tony and Myron down first and then drunkenly moved the picture before he drew the arrow?

A beautiful fit! The arrow on the picture could easily have pointed up to Myron.

The *real* Myron Severn. The *only* Myron Severn. Where was he and who was he?

Big — blond — jovial — deadly — drinker of fine Bourbon — lover of good things — critical judge of a fine Havana cigar. Restaurateur, connoisseur of fine wines. The killer-diller of them all.

M. S. — Myron Severn. M. S. . . .

Careful, Maclain! The smell of shaving lotion and talcum powder and the feel of fine clothes and initials felt on silver-backed brushes are things you can't see. They can trap you when two men are together with you in one small room!

Inspector Larry Davis doesn't make mistakes. That piece that you're clinging to so tightly doesn't fit! But Davis doesn't know Severn and never saw Joe Dale!

No use trying to force it when the shape is wrong. Find another piece that fits. Who killed Tony Ferri last Saturday night when Snowden and Weisman were in New York? Well, Davis knows Weisman — or does he?

Do you know him, Capt. Duncan Maclain?

Which Weisman? What does he look like? Where does he live? There must be a hundred in the New York telephone book — all lawyers! Is the one up here the same one that Davis saw in the poker game Saturday night? Or is he the man who killed Tony Ferri? I think, Maclain, you'd better make a telephone call to Larry Davis — get a description and check with Spud.

Eleven-fifteen.

Listen — the wind! And something else! That must have been lightning that crossed your eyes! Yes, there's the thunder, and the thump of drops on the old tin roof.

The rain has started to fall.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

"LARRY? — Maclain. This Sam Weisman you checked on in the poker game at Snowden's. How long have you known him? . . . Six years? . . . Yes. . . . What did he tell you? . . . That before he left Snowden's that night, Snowden had a phone call from someone in Peekskill? . . . He *what?* . . . Remembered it because Snowden's houseman said Sam Weisman was calling and Weisman laughed about how many people had that name. Larry, wait — for the love of heaven, when did . . . He *what?* . . . Says he just heard from connections that Fink Ferri, Tony's father, is up here, too. My God, Davis! — I don't give a damn if he doesn't know Ferri's present name. *When* did he tell you this? . . . An hour ago when you were at his apartment? I've got to ring off, Larry. Thanks. It's really started to rain!"

Weisman — Ferri — Snowden — Severn.

Half-past twelve and the house is dark and the world is darker and imagination has run away. Like Ted's ran away in New York City. Now it's you who is hearing footsteps — up and down the stairs to the locker room — the stairs in the hall that are close by Spud's door. Soft as pillows, but carrying something. What's the use of looking out? What can you see? Even if they just came up again?

Nothing. Why are you always hearing footsteps through the noise of wind and rain?

You have seventy pieces of the puzzle together. That's extraordinary for a blind man, Captain Maclain!

Huck didn't have paraldehyde. He never drank and never touched a sedative. So that's what the hangman's knot was for — to hide the mark behind his ear where the blackjack struck him. Huck always kept a blackjack underneath the desk in the office. Huck could be as tough or tougher than any drunken employee from St. Francis' Shelter. So he died. Hyland still kept the blackjack there. Add another piece to the puzzle. A blackjack was quicker than paraldehyde at knocking you out and it left no plus-four content in the brain.

A blackjack and a sandbag. A sandbag, hell. A bar bell! Great God above! He and Rivers and Ferguson had seen Swanny take the bar bells apart. A kid could do it — a woman easy — a husky man could have one upstairs, twenty or forty pounds per trip, in no time at all, assemble it on the balcony,

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push it off for the kill, and cut it away to be rolled into the garage and taken apart for return to the gym. There was an entrance from garage to basement. His brain had failed him! Forty-five minutes would do it all — and except for ten minutes of standing on the balcony a killer would scarcely be wet by the rain.

The footsteps? He wasn't dull, he was crazy! He was sitting here petting a jigsaw puzzle while there was scarcely time to stop another kill.

Thank God he was dressed. There wasn't time to awaken Spud. There wasn't time for anything. Yet he took five seconds and saved his life by strapping on his gun in an armpit holster and slipping a jacket over it. Then he was gone on rubber-soled feet, noiseless as a flying shadow down to the end of Alcohol Alley.

He stopped at the door just long enough to hear a sound inside, then opened the door and went on in. The window was open and rain swirling in. The odor of the shaving lotion that Tubby had on in the Captain's office was very faint, but still it was there.

The Captain took two swift strides to the bed. As he bent to touch Matt Snowden's neck in search of the rope he expected to find, Snowden leaped up full at him knocking him sideways. The Captain grappled desperately, but he was grappling with a dead man whose body was moving irresistibly up toward the overhead steampipe and dragging him with it through the air.

He loosed his hold and swung around — then fell to the bed without a sound when the blackjack taken from Hyland's office poleaxed him neatly behind the ear.

The Captain touched his head and groaned. He was in the front seat of a car that was running smoothly and swiftly. Wind and rain beating into his face had brought him to. The window quietly slid closed beside him. The Captain sat completely relaxed, as the wakening blind have learned to do, since to move without knowing where you are spells peril. As the car sped on, it crept in through his clearing mind that he was riding in a Cadillac and the Cadillac was his own.

Without moving either hand so that it might be noticed, he shifted his arm and pressed it tight against his side. His armpit holster hadn't been touched. "Plot and plan, rob and steal, kill and kill," the Captain thought, "but never bother to frisk a blind man for a gun!"

He said very softly, "Is that you driving, Cappo?"

Sam Weisman's voice said, "Scarcely, Captain. I'm afraid I had to knock him out, too. He's unconscious and tied in the seat behind us. You see, I needed him in his uniform. I don't believe the doctor heard a sound."

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"It's worthy of you," said Duncan Maclain. "I don't see why you didn't hang me like Huck and Tubby."

"I put all the paraphernalia away — and decided to get away myself after you burst in so crudely. I even have all my baggage with me, and yours and Cappo's as well. We may have quite a drive, Captain."

"And when we near our destination, I suppose you've planned a similar murder to Tony's — a deliberate hit and run — then a crackup in which Cappo is killed. Clever as you think you are, you can't get away with it, Sam."

"You mean the police will start looking for Sam Weisman, the smart Jew lawyer?" Sam laughed. "He dies tonight forever, Captain, along with you and Fink Ferri. Does that surprise you — to learn that Matt Snowden is Fink Ferri, or was until he got a bit sore about my killing his bastard son?"

"No," said Maclain, "it doesn't surprise me. I know about the real Sam Weisman in New York. I know how Tubby sometimes took his identity, and sometimes took the name of Matt Snowden — covered all the time by Joe Dale posing as Tubby at the Broadway Palace Hotel."

"And you're the only one who does know, Captain." Sam speeded up the car. "Tubby laid the groundwork well for me with his blackmail, his rackets, his murders, and his triple Severn-Weisman-Snowden identity. When you die, Captain, they all die including me. Only I have nearly nine hundred thousand cash in safe deposit vaults under various names — most of which was made by Severn. In spite of the saying 'You can't take it with you,' that's exactly what I intend to do — take it all with me."

The Captain heard the familiar hum that the car always made when it hit a speed over seventy.

"You've overlooked my police dog, Dreist," said Duncan Maclain. "He undoubtedly started barking immediately when you drove off with my car. It may have taken him some time to arouse the place, but I judge by your speed that a car is following us now."

The Cadillac swung sharp right up a bumpy road and stopped with a jerk. The motor was cut. The driver's door opened and slammed as Sam got out. The Captain moved with lightning speed. Both doors were locked inside, and the window at the Captain's right was opened with the button a space of not more than six inches.

The Captain heard Sam try the door on the right-hand side and swear.

"Get out, Maclain, and make it quick!"

"So you can run me down? I like it here, Sam."

"Damn you to hell, Maclain! I have a gun on you right now. I'll shoot you if you don't get out of there."

A siren wailed in the distance.

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"You're a rotten shot," said Duncan Maclain, and slid from the seat to sit on the floor. "You proved that you couldn't hit a man who was three feet from you at the Broadway Palace Hotel."

Cloth slithered against the edge of the window as Weisman's arm came through the six-inch opening to point the gun toward Maclain on the floor.

The Captain's left hand touched the closing button as Weisman's pistol fired. The window moved up smoothly on Weisman's arm, sending the bullet through the Cadillac's ceiling.

The Captain drew like a striking snake and sent three bullets from his .38 through the glass of the Cadillac's window.

He opened the door by the driver's seat and climbed from the car to get in the back and free Cappo. He hadn't even waited to hear the sound of a body's fall.

The siren was getting very near.

Ferguson found him with Cappo's head on his knees and asked him what the hell had happened.

"Cappo and I were kidnaped," said Duncan Maclain, "and I just shot Tubby Severn. You'll find his body on the other side of the car. Let's get Cappo to a doctor."

The Inspector was silent until he had them halfway back to the health farm in the speeding police car.

"How in the hell," he yelled above the siren's wail, "did that mug ever hit on hanging people with a bar bell?"

"You can't even give him credit for that," the Captain said sadly. "On April 6th, 1926, the state of Connecticut hanged Gerald Chapman for the killing of Patrolman James Skelly. He was hanged in fifteen seconds with a hanging machine that jerked his body up out of a chair and slammed it against a thirty-foot ceiling. A weight that was a little too heavy had been dropped. Tubby very thoughtfully got the weight of his victims from Swanny's daily records and put just enough poundage on the bar bell. Isn't that about all?"

"No," said Ferguson. "If that is really Myron Severn, why did he pick the name Sam Weisman?"

"First, the best alias is a name that doesn't look like you," Maclain told him. "If you were told Sam Weisman was among those present would you ever connect the fellow with a sleek fat blond called Tubby? I certainly didn't, and I can't see."

"Dammit, you're right," Ferguson said. "I didn't, and I can see. What's the second? You said that one was first."

"There was a real Sam Weisman, a decent New York lawyer, who had worked for Tubby for years. That fact, and the use of his name, gave Tubby

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the perfect alibi on Ferri's killing. There's another —"

"Aren't two enough? I'm dizzy now."

The Captain laughed. "The third will really slay you, as it nearly did me. Another alias Tubby often took was the one used by Fink Ferri: Matt Snowden."

"That's simple enough," Ferguson growled. "The initials are the same — M. S. — Myron Severn. Matt Snowden. But the bastard had S. W. on his belt buckle."

"And on his military brushes, and with a beautiful raised set on all his luggage that you'll find, Inspector, for convenience's sake could be easily turned around."

Ferguson almost stopped the car. "Turned around?"

"Yes, turned around," said Duncan Maclain, "instantly changing Myron Severn's or Matt Snowden's initials into Sam Weisman's. Take the *S W* belt buckle and see whose initials it makes when you turn it upside down. You'll see why I couldn't figure out who owned some initialed military brushes, and why he's had me standing on my head for quite a while!"

THE END

Look for the next Mercury Mystery, coming soon — "Death of a Cheat" (formerly "The Long Window"), by John M. Eshleman. Socialite Lucy Storm was a married woman. But you'd never have known it by watching her when there were men around. She drank too much and flirted more. And one day, someone used a necktie to put an end to her cheating. Lucy was dead. But in death, as in life, she was going to cause a lot of trouble — to her husband, her friends, and to Lieutenant Koharik of the police department who was forced to risk first suspension from the force and then his life before he trapped a wily killer. . . . ". . . action fine . . ." says The Saturday Review.

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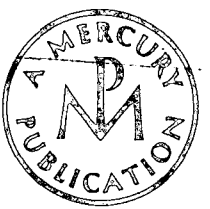
YOU DIE TODAY

There were many things for Ted Yates to be afraid of since he'd been blinded in the war: he was afraid of cars hurtling through perpetually dark streets; of vanishing footsteps that seemed to follow him; of his friend and benefactor, Tubby Severn, who appeared to be changing from a gay, carefree guy into a brooding drinker.

Perhaps if Ted had known blind investigator Duncan Maclain when the fear first started he might have avoided trouble. Unfortunately, Ted didn't meet Maclain until it was almost too late—until after the night someone took a shot at Tubby and the cops found Ted, himself, holding the smoking pistol . . .



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